

**MARTIN LUTHER, *FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE REFORMATION, OR THE 95 THESES AND THE THREE PRIMARY WORKS OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER (1883)*  
ON THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH**

**EDITION USED**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**III ON THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH**

- CONCERNING THE LORD’S SUPPER
  - CONCERNING THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM
  - CONCERNING THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE
  - OF CONFIRMATION.
  - OF MATRIMONY.
  - OF ORDERS.
  - ON THE SACRAMENT OF EXTREME UNCTION.
-

### **III ON THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH**

Martin Luther, of the Order of St. Augustine, salutes his friend Hermann Tulichius.

Whether I will or not, I am compelled to become more learned day by day, since so many great masters vie with each other in urging me on and giving me practice. I wrote about indulgences two years ago, but now I extremely regret having published that book. At that time I was still involved in a great and superstitious respect for the tyranny of Rome, which led me to judge that indulgences were not to be totally rejected, seeing them, as I did, to be approved by so general a consent among men. And no wonder, for at that time it was I alone who was rolling this stone. Afterwards, however, with the kind aid of Sylvester and the friars, who supported indulgences so strenuously, I perceived that they were nothing but mere impostures of the flatterers of Rome, whereby to make away with the faith of God and the money of men. And I wish I could prevail upon the booksellers, and persuade all who have read them, to burn the whole of my writings on indulgences, and in place of all I have written about them to adopt this proposition: Indulgences are wicked devices of the flatterers of Rome.

After this, Eccius and Emser, with their fellow-conspirators, began to instruct me concerning the primacy of the Pope. Here too, not to be ungrateful to such learned men, I must confess that their works helped me on greatly; for, while I had denied that the Papacy had any divine right, I still admitted that it had a human right. But after hearing and reading the super-subtle subtleties of those coxcombs, by which they so ingeniously set up their idol—my mind being not entirely unteachable in such matters—I now know and am sure that the Papacy is the kingdom of Babylon, and the power of Nimrod the mighty hunter. Here moreover, that all may go prosperously with my friends, I entreat the booksellers, and entreat my readers, to burn all that I have published on this subject, and to hold to the following proposition:

The Papacy is the mighty hunting of the Bishop of Rome.

This is proved from the reasonings of Eccius, of Emser, and of the Leipzig lecturer on the Bible.

At the present time they are playing at schooling me concerning communion in both kinds, and some other subjects of the greatest importance. I must take pains not to listen in vain to these philosophical guides of mine. A certain Italian friar of Cremona has written a “Revocation of Martin Luther to the Holy See”—that is to say, not that I revoke, as the words imply, but that he revokes me. This is the sort of Latin that the Italians nowadays are beginning to write. Another friar, a German of Leipzig, Lecturer, as you know, on the whole canon of the Bible, has written against me concerning the Sacrament in both kinds, and is about, as I hear, to do still greater and wonderful wonders. The Italian indeed has cautiously concealed his name; perhaps alarmed by the examples of Cajetan and Sylvester. The man of Leipzig, however, as befits a vigorous and fierce German, has set forth in a number of verses on his title-page, his name, his life, his

sanctity, his learning, his office, his glory, his honour, almost his very shoe-lasts. From him no doubt I shall learn not a little, since he writes a letter of dedication to the very Son of God; so familiar are these saints with Christ, who reigns in heaven. In short, three magpies seem to be addressing me, one, a Latin one, well; another, a Greek one, still better; the third, a Hebrew one, best of all. What do you think I have to do now, my dear Hermann, but to prick up my ears? The matter is handled at Leipzig by the Observants of the Holy Cross.

Hitherto I have foolishly thought that it would be an excellent thing, if it were determined by a General Council, that both kinds in the Sacrament should be administered to the laity. To correct this opinion, this more than most learned friar says that it was neither commanded nor decreed, whether by Christ or by the Apostles, that both kinds should be administered to the laity; and that it has therefore been left to the judgment of the Church, which we are bound to obey, what should be done or left undone on this point. Thus speaks he. You ask, perhaps, what craze has possession of the man, or against whom he is writing; since I did not condemn the use of one kind, and did leave it to the judgment of the Church to ordain the use of both kinds. And this he himself endeavours to assert, with the object of combating me by this very argument. I reply, that this kind of argument is a familiar one with all who write against Luther; namely, either to assert the very thing which they attack, or to set up a figment that they may attack it. Thus did Sylvester, Eccius, Emser, the men of Cologne too, and those of Louvain. If this friar had gone back from their spirit, he would not have written against Luther.

A greater piece of good fortune, however, has befallen this man than any of the others. Whereas he intended to prove that the use of one kind had neither been commanded nor decreed, but left to the decision of the Church, he brings forward Scriptures to prove that, by the command of Christ, the use of one kind was ordained for the laity. Thus it is true, according to this new interpreter of Scripture, that the use of one kind was not commanded, and at the same time was commanded, by Christ. You know how specially those logicians of Leipzig employ this new kind of argument. Does not Emser also, after having professed in his former book to speak fairly about me, and after having been convicted by me of the foulest envy and of base falsehoods, confess, when about to confute me in his later book, that both were true, and that he had written of me in both an unfair and a fair spirit? A good man indeed, as you know!

But listen to our specious advocate of one species, in whose mind the decision of the Church and the command of Christ are the same thing; and again the command of Christ and the absence of his command are the same thing. With what dexterity he proves that only one kind should be granted to the laity, by the command of Christ, that is, by the decision of the Church! He marks it with capital letters in this way, “AN INFALLIBLE FOUNDATION.” Next he handles with incredible wisdom the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. John, in which Christ speaks of the bread of heaven and the bread of life, which is Himself. These words this most learned man not only misapplies to the Sacrament of the Altar, but goes farther, and, because Christ said: “I am the living bread,” and not: “I am the living cup,” he concludes that in that passage the sacrament in only one kind was appointed for the laity. But the words that follow: “My flesh is meat

indeed, and my blood is drink indeed;” and again, “Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood”—since it was evident to this friar’s brains that they tell irrefutably in favour of reception in both kinds, and against that in one kind—he evades very happily and learnedly in this way: “That Christ meant nothing else by these words, than that he who should receive one kind, should receive under this both the body and the blood.” This he lays down as his infallible foundation of a structure so worthy of holy and heavenly reverence.

Learn now, along with me, from this man, that in the sixth chapter of St. John Christ commands reception in one kind, but in such a manner that this commanding means leaving the matter to the decision of the Church; and further, that Christ in the same chapter speaks of the laity only, not of the presbyters. For to us this living bread from heaven, that is, the sacrament in one kind, does not belong, but perchance the bread of death from hell. Now what is to be done with the deacons and sub-deacons? As they are neither laymen nor priests, they ought, on this distinguished authority, to use neither one nor both kinds. You understand, my dear Tulichius, this new and *observant* manner of handling Scripture. But you must also learn this, that Christ, in the sixth chapter of St. John, is speaking of the sacrament of the Eucharist; though He Himself teaches us that He is speaking of faith in the incarnate word, by saying: “This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom He hath sent.” But this Leipzig professor of the Bible must be permitted to prove whatever he pleases out of any passage of Scripture he pleases. For he is an Anaxagorean, nay, an Aristotelian theologian, to whom names and words when transposed mean the same things and everything. Throughout his whole book he so fits together the testimonies of Scripture, that, if he wishes to prove that Christ is in the sacrament, he ventures to begin thus: “The Lesson of the book of the Revelation of the blessed John.” And as suitably as this would be said, so suitably does he say everything, and thinks, like a wise man, to adorn his ravings by the number of passages he brings forward.

I pass over the rest, that I may not quite kill you with the dregs of this most offensive drain. Lastly he adduces Paul (1 Cor. xi.), who says that he had received from the Lord and had delivered to the Corinthians the use both of the bread and of the cup. Here again, as everywhere else, our advocate of one species handles the Scriptures admirably, and teaches that in that passage Paul permitted—not “delivered”—the use of both kinds. Do you ask how he proves it? Out of his own head, as in the case of the sixth chapter of John; for it does not become this lecturer to give a reason for what he says, since he is one of those whose proofs and teachings all come from their own visions. Here then we are taught that the Apostle in that passage did not write to the whole church of Corinth, but only to the laity, and that therefore he gave no permission to the priests, but that they were deprived of the whole sacrament; and next, that, by a new rule of grammar, “I have received from the Lord” means the same thing as “It has been permitted by the Lord;” and “I delivered to you” the same thing as “I permitted to you.” I beg you especially to note this. For it follows hence that not only the Church, but every worthless fellow anywhere will be at liberty, under the teaching of this master, to turn into permissions the whole body of the commandments, institutions, and ordinances of Christ and the Apostles.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

I see that this man is possessed by an angel of Satan, and that those who act in collusion with him are seeking to obtain a name in the world through me, as being worthy to contend with Luther. But this hope of theirs shall be disappointed, and, in my contempt for them, I shall leave them for ever unnamed, and shall content myself with this one answer to the whole of their books. If they are worthy that Christ should bring them back to a sound mind, I pray him to do so in his mercy. If they are not worthy of this, then I pray that they may never cease to write such books, and that the enemies of the truth may not be permitted to read any others. It is a common and true saying: “This I know for certain, that if I fight with filth, whether I conquer or am conquered, I am sure to be defiled.” In the next place, as I see that they have plenty of leisure and of paper, I will take care that they shall have abundant matter for writing, and will keep in advance of them, so that while they, in the boastfulness of victory, are triumphing over some one heresy of mine, as it seems to them, I shall meanwhile be setting up a new one. For I too am desirous that these illustrious leaders in war should be adorned with many titles of honour. And so, while they are murmuring that I approve of communion in both kinds, and are most successfully engaged on this very important subject, so worthy of themselves, I shall go farther, and shall now endeavour to show that all who deny to the laity communion in both kinds are acting impiously. To do this the more conveniently, I shall make a first essay on the bondage of the Church of Rome; with the intention of saying very much more in its own proper time, when those most learned papists shall have got the better of this book.

This, moreover, I do in order that no pious reader who may meet with my book may be disgusted at the dross I have handled, and have reason to complain that he finds nothing to read which can cultivate or instruct his mind, or at least give occasion for instructive reflection. You know how dissatisfied my friends are that I should occupy myself with the paltry twistings of these men. They say that the very reading of their books is an ample confutation of them, but that from me they look for better things, which Satan is trying to hinder by means of these men. I have determined to follow the advice of my friends, and to leave the business of wrangling and inveighing to those hornets.

Of the Italian friar of Cremona I shall say nothing. He is a simple and unlearned man, who is endeavouring to bring me back by some thongs of rhetoric to the Holy See, from which I am not conscious of having ever withdrawn, nor has any one proved that I have. His principal argument in some ridiculous passages is, that I ought to be moved for the sake of my profession, and of the transfer of the imperial power to the Germans. He seems indeed altogether to have meant not so much to urge my return as to write the praises of the French and of the Roman pontiff, and he must be allowed to testify his obsequiousness to them by this little work, such as it is. He neither deserves to be handled severely, since he does not seem to be actuated by any malice, nor to be learnedly confuted, since through pure ignorance and inexperience he trifles with the whole subject.

To begin. I must deny that there are seven Sacraments, and must lay it down, for the time being, that there are only three, baptism, penance, and the bread, and that by the Court of Rome all these have been brought into miserable bondage, and the Church despoiled of all her liberty. And yet, if I were to speak according to the usage of Scripture, I should

hold that there was only one sacrament, and three sacramental signs. I shall speak on this point more at length at the proper time; but now I speak of the sacrament of the bread, the first of all sacraments.

I shall say then what advance I have made as the result of my meditations in the ministry of this sacrament. For at the time when I published a discourse on the Eucharist I was still involved in the common custom, and did not trouble myself either about the rightful or the wrongful power of the Pope. But now that I have been called forth and become practised in argument, nay, have been dragged by force into this arena, I shall speak out freely what I think. Let all the papists laugh or lament against me alone.

In the first place, the sixth chapter of John must be set aside altogether, as not saying a single syllable about the sacrament; not only because the sacrament had not yet been instituted, but much more because the very sequence of the discourse and of its statements shows clearly that Christ was speaking—as I have said before—of faith in the incarnate Word. For He says: “My words, they are spirit and they are life;” showing that He was speaking of that spiritual eating, wherewith he who eats, lives; while the Jews understood Him to speak of a carnal eating, and therefore raised a dispute. But no eating gives life, except the eating of faith, for this is the really spiritual and living eating; as Augustine says: “Why dost thou get ready thy stomach and thy teeth? Believe, and thou hast eaten.” A sacramental eating does not give life, for many eat unworthily, so that Christ cannot be understood to have spoken of the sacrament in this passage.

There are certainly some who have misapplied these words to the sacrament, as did the writer of the decretals some time ago, and many others. It is one thing, however, to misapply the Scriptures, and another to take them in their legitimate sense; otherwise when Christ says: “Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, ye have no life in you,” He would be condemning all infants, all the sick, all the absent, and all who were hindered in whatever manner from a sacramental eating, however eminent their faith, if in these words He had meant to enjoin a sacramental eating. Thus Augustine, in his second book against Julianus, proves from Innocentius that even infants, without receiving the sacrament, eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ; that is, partake in the same faith as the Church. Let this then be considered as settled, that the sixth chapter of John has nothing to do with the matter. For which reason I have written elsewhere that the Bohemians could not rightfully depend upon this passage in their defence of reception in both kinds.

### **CONCERNING THE LORD’S SUPPER**

There are two passages which treat in the clearest manner of this subject, and at which we shall look,—the statements in the Gospels respecting the Lord’s Supper, and the words of Paul. (1 Cor. xi.) Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree that Christ gave the whole sacrament to all His disciples; and that Paul taught both parts of it is so certain, that no one has yet been shameless enough to assert the contrary. Add to this, that according to the relation of Matthew, Christ did not say concerning the bread, “Eat ye all of this,” but did say concerning the cup, “Drink ye all of this.” Mark also does not say, “they all ate,” but

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

“they all drank of it.” Each writer attaches the mark of universality to the cup, not to the bread; as if the Spirit foresaw the schism that should come, and should forbid to some that communion in the cup which Christ would have common to all. How furiously would they rave against us, if they had found the word “all” applied to the bread, and not to the cup. They would leave us no way of escape, would clamour us down, pronounce us heretics, condemn us as schismatics. But when the word stands on our side against them, they allow themselves to be bound by no laws of logic, these men of freest will, while they change, and change again, and throw into utter confusion even the things which are of God.

But suppose me to be standing on the other side and questioning my lords the papists. In the Supper of the Lord, the whole sacrament, or the sacrament in both kinds, was either given to the presbyters alone, or at the same time to the laity. If to the presbyters alone (for thus they will have it to be), then it is in no wise lawful that any kind should be given to the laity; for it ought not to be rashly given to any, to whom Christ did not give it at the first institution. Otherwise, if we allow one of Christ’s institutions to be changed, we make the whole body of His laws of no effect; and any man may venture to say that he is bound by no law or institution of Christ. For in dealing with Scripture one special exception does away with any general statement. If on the other hand it was given to the laity as well, it inevitably follows, that reception in both kinds ought not to be denied to the laity; and in denying it to them when they seek it, we act impiously, and contrary to the deed, example, and institution of Christ.

I confess that I have been unable to resist this reasoning, and have neither read, heard of, nor discovered anything to be said on the other side, while the words and example of Christ stand unshaken, who says—not by way of permission, but of commandment—“Drink ye all of this.” For if all are to drink of it, and this cannot be understood as said to the presbyters alone, then it is certainly an impious deed to debar the laity from it when they seek it, were it even an angel from heaven who did so. For what they say of its being left to the decision of the Church which kind should be administered, is said without rational ground, is alleged without authority, and is as easily contemned as proved; nor can it avail against an adversary who opposes to us the word and deed of Christ, and whose blows must therefore be returned with the word of Christ; and this we have not on our side.

If, however, either kind can be denied to the laity, then by the same decision of the Church a part of baptism or of penance might be taken from them, since in each case the reason of the matter and the power are alike. Therefore as the whole of baptism and the whole of absolution are to be granted to all the laity, so is the whole sacrament of the bread, if they seek it. I am much astonished, however, at their assertion that it is wholly unlawful, under pain of mortal sin, for presbyters to receive only one kind in the mass; and this for no other reason than that (as they all unanimously say) the two kinds form one full sacrament, which ought not to be divided. Let them tell me, then, why it is lawful to divide it in the case of the laity, and why they alone should not be granted the entire sacrament. Do they not admit, on their own showing, that either both kinds ought to be granted to the laity, or that it is no lawful sacrament which is granted to them under one

kind? How can the one kind be a full sacrament in the case of the laity, and not a full one in the case of the presbyters? Why do they vaunt the decision of the Church and the power of the Pope in this matter? The words of God and the testimonies of truth cannot thus be done away with.

It follows further that, if the Church can take from the laity the one kind, the wine, she can also take from them the other kind, the bread, and thus might take from the laity the whole Sacrament of the Altar, and deprive the institution of Christ of all effect in their case. But, I ask, by what authority? If, however, she cannot take away the bread, or both kinds, neither can she the wine. Nor can any possible argument on this point be brought against an opponent, since the Church must necessarily have the same power in regard to either kind as in regard to both kinds; if she has it not as regards both kinds, she has it not as regards either. I should like to hear what the flatterers of Rome may choose to say on this point.

But what strikes me most forcibly of all, and thoroughly convinces me, is that saying of Christ: "This is my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins." Here you see most clearly that the blood is given to all for whose sins it is shed. Now who will dare to say that it was not shed for the laity? Do you not see who it is that He addresses as He gives the cup? Does He not give it to all? Does He not say that it was shed for all? "For you," He says. Let us grant that these are priests. "And for many," He continues. These cannot be priests; and yet He says: "Drink ye all of it." I also could easily trifle on this point, and turn the words of Christ into a mockery by my words, as that trifler my opponent does. But those who rest upon the Scriptures in arguing against us, must be refuted by the Scriptures. These are the reasons which have kept me from condemning the Bohemians, who, whether they be good or bad men, certainly have the words and deeds of Christ on their side, while we have neither, but only that idle device of men: "The Church hath thus ordered it;" while it was not the Church, but the tyrants of the churches, without the consent of the Church, that is, of the people of God, who have thus ordered it.

Now where, I ask, is the necessity, where is the religious obligation, where is the use, of denying to the laity reception in both kinds, that is, the visible sign, when all men grant them the reality of the sacrament without the sign? If they grant the reality, which is the greater, why do they not grant the sign, which is the less? For in every sacrament the sign, in so far as it is a sign, is incomparably less than the reality itself. What then, I ask, should hinder the granting of the lesser thing, when the greater is granted; unless indeed, as it seems to me, this has happened by the permission of God in His anger, to be the occasion of a schism in the Church; and to show that, having long ago lost the reality of the sacrament, we are fighting on behalf of the sign, which is the lesser thing, against the reality, which is the greatest and only important thing; just as some persons fight on behalf of ceremonies against charity. This monstrous perversion appears to have begun at the same time at which we began in our folly to set Christian charity at nought for the sake of worldly riches, that God might show by this terrible proof that we think signs of greater consequence than the realities themselves. What perversity it would be, if you



were to concede that the faith of baptism is granted to one seeking baptism, and yet deny him the sign of that very faith, namely, water.

Last of all stand the irrefutable words of Paul, which must close every mouth (1 Cor. xi.): “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.” He does not say, as this friar falsely asserts out of his own head, “I permitted to you.” Nor is it true that he granted the Corinthians reception in both kinds on account of the contentions among them. In the first place, as the text itself shows, the contention was not about the reception in both kinds, but about the contemptuousness of the rich and the envy of the poor, as is clear from the text, which says: “One is hungry and another is drunken,” and, “Ye shame them that have not.” Then too he is not speaking of what he delivered as if it were for the first time. He does not say: “I receive from the Lord and I deliver to you,” but “I have received and I have delivered,” namely, at the beginning of his preaching, long before this contention arose, thus signifying that he had delivered to them the reception in both kinds. This “delivering” means “enjoining,” as he elsewhere uses the same word. Thus the smoke clouds of assertion which this friar heaps together concerning permission, without Scripture, without reason, and without cause, go for nothing. His opponents do not ask what his dreams are, but what the judgment of Scripture is on these points; and out of it he can produce not a tittle in support of his dream, while they can bring forward so many thunderbolts in defence of their belief.

Rise up then in one body, all ye flatterers of the Pope, be active, defend yourselves from the charge of impiety, tyranny, and treason against the Gospel, and wrongful calumination of your brethren, ye who proclaim as heretics those who cannot approve of the mere dreams of your brains, in opposition to such plain and powerful Scriptures. If either of the two are to be called heretics and schismatics, it is not the Bohemians, not the Greeks, since they take their stand on the Gospels; but you Romans who are heretics and impious schismatics, you who presume upon your own figments alone, against the manifest teaching of the Scriptures of God.

But what can be more ridiculous, or more worthy of the head of this friar, than to say that the Apostle wrote thus and gave this permission to a particular church, that of Corinth, but not to the universal Church? Whence does he prove this? Out of his usual store—his own impious head. When the universal Church takes this epistle as addressed to itself, reads it, and follows it in every respect, why not in this part of it? If we admit that any one epistle of Paul, or one passage in any one epistle, does not concern the universal Church, we do away with the whole authority of Paul. The Corinthians might say that what he taught concerning faith, in writing to the Romans, did not concern them. What could be more blasphemous or more mad than this mad idea? Far be it from us to imagine that there can be one tittle in the whole of Paul, which the whole of the universal Church ought not to imitate and keep. Not thus thought the Fathers, nor any until these perilous times, in which Paul foretold that there should be blasphemers, blind and senseless men; among whom this friar is one, or even the foremost.

But let us grant this intolerably wild assertion. If Paul gave permission to a particular church, then, on your own showing, the Greeks and the Bohemians are acting rightly, for

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

they are particular churches, and therefore it is enough that they are not acting against the teaching of Paul, who at least gives them permission. Furthermore, Paul had not power to permit of anything contrary to the institution of Christ. Therefore, on behalf of the Greeks and the Bohemians, I set up these sayings of Christ and of Paul against thee, Rome, and all thy flatterers; nor canst thou show that power has been given thee to change these things by one hair's breadth; much less to accuse others of heresy, because they disregard thy presumptuous pretensions. It is thou who deservest to be accused of impiety and tyranny.

We also read the words of Cyprian, who by himself is powerful enough to stand against all the Romanists, and who testifies in his discourse concerning the lapsed in the fifth book, that it had been the custom in that church for both kinds to be administered to laymen and even to children; yea, for the body of the Lord to be given into their hands; as he shows by many instances. Among other things he thus reproves some of the people: "And because he does not immediately receive the body of the Lord with unclean hands, or drink the blood of the Lord with polluted mouth, he is angry with the priests as sacrilegious." You see that he is here speaking of certain sacrilegious laymen, who wished to receive from the priests the body and the blood. Have you here, wretched flatterer, anything to gabble? Say that this holy martyr, this teacher of the Church, so highly endowed with the apostolic spirit, was a heretic, and availed himself of a permission in his particular church!

He relates in the same place an incident which had occurred in his own sight and presence, when he writes in the plainest terms that as deacon he had given the cup to an infant girl, and when the child struggled against it, had even poured the blood of the Lord into its mouth. We read the same thing of St. Donatus, whose broken cup how dully does this wretched flatterer try to get rid of. "I read," he says, "that the cup was broken, I do not read that the blood was given." What wonder that he who perceives in the Holy Scriptures what he wills to perceive, should also read in historical narratives what he wills to read! But can he in this way at all establish the power of the Church to decide, or can he thus confute heretics? But enough said on this subject; for I did not begin this treatise in order to answer one who is unworthy of an answer, but in order to lay open the truth of the matter.

I conclude, then, that to deny reception in both kinds to the laity is an act of impiety and tyranny, and one not in the power of any angel, much less of any Pope or Council whatever. Nor do I care for the Council of Constance, for, if its authority is to prevail, why should not also that of the Council of Basle, which decreed on the other hand that the Bohemians should be allowed to receive in both kinds? a point which was carried there after long discussion, as the extant annals and documents of that Council prove. This fact that ignorant flatterer brings forward on behalf of his own dreams, so wisely does he handle the whole matter.

The first bondage, then, of this sacrament is as regards its substance or completeness, which the tyranny of Rome has wrested from us. Not that they sin against Christ, who use one kind only, since Christ has not commanded the use of any, but has left it to the choice

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

of each individual, saying: “This do ye, as oft as ye shall do it, in remembrance of me;” but they sin who forbid that both kinds should be given to those who desire to use this freedom of choice, and the fault is not in the laity, but in the priests. The sacrament does not belong to the priests, but to all; nor are the priests lords, but servants, whose duty it is to give both kinds to those who seek them, as often as they seek them. If they have snatched this right from the laity, and forcibly denied it to them, they are tyrants, and the laity are free from blame, whether they go without one or both kinds; for meanwhile they will be saved by their faith, and by their desire for a complete sacrament. So too the ministers themselves are bound to grant baptism and absolution to him who seeks them; if they do not grant them, the seeker has the full merit of his own faith, while they will be accused before Christ as wicked servants. Thus of old the holy Fathers in the desert passed many years without communicating in either kind of the sacrament.

I am not, therefore, advocating the seizing by force on both kinds, as if we were of necessity commanded and compelled to receive them, but I am instructing the conscience, that every man may endure the tyranny of Rome, knowing that he has been forcibly deprived of his right in the sacrament on account of his sins. This only I would have, that none should justify the tyranny of Rome, as if she had done right in denying one kind to the laity, but that we should abhor it, and withhold our consent from it, though we may bear it, just as if we were in bondage with the Turk, where we should not be at liberty to use either kind. For this reason I have said that it would be a fine thing, in my opinion, if this bondage were done away with by the decree of a general council, and Christian liberty restored to us out of the hands of the tyrant of Rome; and if to each man were left his own free choice about seeking and using it, as it is left in the case of baptism and penance. Now, however, by the same tyranny, he compels one kind to be received year by year; so extinct is the liberty granted us by Christ, and such are the deserts of our impious ingratitude.

The other bondage of the same sacrament is a milder one, inasmuch as it regards the conscience, but one which it is by far the most perilous of all things to touch, much more to condemn. Here I shall be a Wickliffite, and a heretic under six hundred names. What then? Since the Bishop of Rome has ceased to be a bishop and has become a tyrant, I fear absolutely none of his decrees, since I know that neither he, nor even a general council, has power to establish new articles of the faith.

Formerly, when I was imbibing the scholastic theology, my lord the Cardinal of Cambray gave me occasion for reflection, by arguing most acutely, in the fourth book of the Sentences, that it would be much more probable, and that fewer superfluous miracles would have to be introduced, if real bread and real wine, and not only their accidents, were understood to be upon the altar, unless the Church had determined the contrary. Afterwards, when I saw what the church was, which had thus determined, namely, the Thomistic, that is, the Aristotelian Church, I became bolder, and whereas I had been before in great straits of doubt, I now at length established my conscience in the former opinion, namely, that there were real bread and real wine, in which were the real flesh and real blood of Christ, in no other manner and in no less degree than the other party assert them to be under the accidents. And this I did, because I saw that the opinions of

the Thomists, whether approved by the Pope or by a council, remained opinions, and did not become articles of the faith, even were an angel from heaven to decree otherwise. For that which is asserted without the support of the Scriptures, or of an approved revelation, it is permitted to hold as an opinion, but it is not necessary to believe. Now this opinion of Thomas is so vague, and so unsupported by the Scriptures, or by reason, that he seems to me to have known neither his philosophy nor his logic. For Aristotle speaks of accidents and subject very differently from St. Thomas; and it seems to me that we ought to be sorry for so great a man, when we see him striving, not only to draw his opinions on matters of faith from Aristotle, but to establish them upon an authority whom he did not understand; a most unfortunate structure raised on a most unfortunate foundation.

I quite consent then that whoever chooses to hold either opinion should do so. My only object now is to remove scruples of conscience, so that no man may fear being guilty of heresy, if he believes that real bread and real wine are present on the altar. Let him know that he is at liberty, without peril to his salvation, to imagine, think, or believe in either of the two ways, since here there is no necessity of faith. In the first place, I will not listen to those, or make the slightest account of them, who will cry out that this doctrine is Wickliffite, Hussite, heretical, and opposed to the decisions of the Church. None will do this but those whom I have convicted of being themselves in many ways heretical, in the matter of indulgences, of free will and the grace of God, of good works and sins, etc. If Wickliff was once a heretic, they are themselves ten times heretics, and it is an excellent thing to be blamed and accused by heretics and perverse sophists, since to please them would be the height of impiety. Besides, they can give no other proof of their own opinions, nor have they any other way of disproving the contrary ones, than by saying: “This is Wickliffite, Hussite, heretical.” This feeble argument, and no other, is always at the tip of their tongue; and if you ask for Scripture authority, they say: “This is our opinion, and the Church has decided it thus.” To such an extent do men who are reprobate concerning the faith, and unworthy of belief, dare to propose to us their own fancies, under the authority of the Church, as articles of the faith.

There is, however, very much to be said for my opinion; in the first place this—that no violence ought to be done to the words of God, neither by man, nor by angel, but that, as far as possible, they ought to be kept to their simplest meaning, and not to be taken, unless the circumstances manifestly compel us to do so, out of their grammatical and proper signification, that we may not give our adversaries any opportunity of evading the teaching of the whole Scriptures. For this reason the ideas of Origen were rightly rejected, when, in contempt of the plain grammatical meaning, he turned the trees, and all other objects described as existing in Paradise, into allegories; since hence it might be inferred that trees were not created by God. So in the present case, since the Evangelists write clearly that Christ took bread and blessed it, and since the book of Acts and the Apostle Paul also call it bread, real bread and real wine must be understood, just as the cup was real. For even these men do not say that the cup is transubstantiated. Since then it is not necessary to lay it down that a transubstantiation is effected by the operation of divine power, it must be held as a figment of human opinion; for it rests on no support of Scripture or of reason. It is forcing on us a novel and absurd usage of words, to take bread as meaning the form or accidents of bread, and wine as the form or accidents of wine.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

Why do they not take all other things as forms or accidents? Even if everything else were consistent with this idea, it would not be lawful thus to enfeeble the word of God, and to deprive it so unjustly of its proper meaning.

The Church, however, kept the right faith for more than twelve centuries, nor did the holy Fathers ever or anywhere make mention of this transubstantiation (a portentous word and dream indeed), until the counterfeit Aristotelian philosophy began to make its inroads on the Church within these last three hundred years, during which many other erroneous conclusions have also been arrived at, such as:—that the Divine essence is neither generated nor generates; that the soul is the substantial form of the human body; and other like assertions, which are made absolutely without reason or cause, as the Cardinal of Cambray himself confesses.

They will say, perhaps, that we shall be in peril of idolatry if we do not admit that bread and wine are not really there. This is truly ridiculous, for the laity have never learnt the subtle philosophical distinction between substance and accidents; nor, if they were taught it, could they understand it; and there is the same peril, if we keep the accidents, which they see, as in the case of the substance, which they do not see. For if it is not the accidents which they adore, but Christ concealed under them, why should they adore the substance, which they do not see?

But why should not Christ be able to include His body within the substance of bread, as well as within the accidents? Fire and iron, two different substances, are so mingled in red-hot iron, that every part of it is both fire and iron. Why may not the glorious body of Christ much more be in every part of the substance of the bread?

Christ is believed to have been born of the inviolate womb of his mother. In this case too let them say that the flesh of the Virgin was for a time annihilated; or, as they will have it to be more suitably expressed, transubstantiated, that Christ might be enwrapped in its accidents, and at length come forth through its accidents. The same will have to be said respecting the closed door and the closed entrance of the tomb, through both of which He entered, and went out without injury to them. But hence has sprung that Babylon of a philosophy concerning continuous quantity, distinct from substance, till things have come to such a point, that they themselves do not know what are accidents, and what is substance. For who has ever proved to a certainty that heat and cold, colour, light, weight, and form are accidents? Lastly they have been driven to pretend that God creates a new substance additional to those accidents on the altar, on account of the saying of Aristotle, that the essence of an accident is to be *in* something; and have been led to an infinity of monstrous ideas, from all of which they would be free, if they simply allowed the bread on the altar to be real bread. I rejoice greatly, that at least among the common people there remains a simple faith in this sacrament. They neither understand nor argue whether there are accidents in it or substance, but believe with simple faith that the body and blood of Christ are truly contained in it, leaving to these men of leisure the task of arguing as to what it contains.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

But perhaps they will say that we are taught by Aristotle that we must take the subject and predicate of an affirmative proposition to signify the same thing; or, to quote the words of that monster himself in the 6th book of his *Metaphysics*, “An affirmative proposition requires the composition of the extremes;” which they explain as their signifying the same thing. Thus in the words, “This is my body,” they say that we cannot take the subject to signify the bread, but the body of Christ.

What shall we say to this? Whereas we are making Aristotle and human teachings the censors of such sublime and divine matters, why do we not rather cast away these curious enquiries; and simply adhere to the words of Christ, willing to be ignorant of what is done in this sacrament, and content to know that the real body of Christ is present in it by virtue of the words of consecration? Is it necessary to comprehend altogether the manner of the Divine working?

But what do they say to Aristotle, who applies the term “subject” to all the categories of accidents, although he takes the substance to be the first subject? Thus, in his opinion, “this white,” “this great,” “this something,” are subjects, because something is predicated of them. If this is true, and if it is necessary to lay down a doctrine of transubstantiation in order that it may not be asserted of the bread that it is the body of Christ; why, I ask, is not a doctrine of transaccidentation also laid down, that it may not be affirmed of an accident that it is the body of Christ? For the same danger remains, if we regard “this white thing,” or “this round thing” as the subject. On whatever principle transubstantiation is taught, on the same ought transaccidentation to be taught, on account of the two terms of the proposition, as is alleged, signifying the same thing.

If, however, by a high effort of understanding, you make abstraction of the accident, and refuse to regard it as signified by the subject in saying: “This is my body,” why can you not as easily rise above the substance of the bread, and refuse to let it be understood as signified by the subject; so that “this is my body” may be true in the substance no less than in the accident? Especially so since this is a divine work of almighty power, which can operate to the same extent and in the same way in the substance, as it can in the accident.

But, not to philosophize too far, does not Christ appear to have met these curious enquiries in a striking manner, when He said concerning the wine, not, “*Hoc est sanguis meus*,” but “*Hic est sanguis meus*.” He speaks much more clearly still when He brings in the mention of the cup, saying: “This cup is the New Testament in my blood.” (1 Cor. xi.) Does He not seem to have meant to keep us within the bounds of simple faith, just so far as to believe that His blood is in the cup? If, for my part, I cannot understand how the bread can be the body of Christ, I will bring my understanding into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and firmly believe, in simple adherence to His word, not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ. For so shall I be kept safe by his words, where it is said: “Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and said, Take, eat, this (that is, this bread, which He had taken and broken) is my body.” Paul also says: “The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” He does not say that the communion is in the bread, but that the bread itself is

the communion of the body of Christ. What if philosophy does not understand these things? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle. Does it even understand the transubstantiation which these men speak of, seeing that they themselves confess that all philosophy breaks down on this point? The reason why, in the Greek and Latin, the pronoun *this* is referred to the body, is that the genders are alike; but in the Hebrew, where there is no neuter gender, it is referred to the bread; so that we might properly say: “This (bread) is my body.” Both the usage of language and common sense prove that the subject points to the bread, and not to the body, when He says, *Hoc est corpus meum*, that is, this bread is my body.

As then the case is with Christ Himself, so is it also with the sacrament. For it is not necessary to the bodily indwelling of the Godhead that the human nature should be transubstantiated, that so the Godhead may be contained beneath the accidents of the human nature. But each nature is entire, and we can say with truth: This man is God; this God is man. Though philosophy does not receive this, yet faith receives it, and greater is the authority of the word of God, than the capacity of our intellect. Thus too in the sacrament, it is not necessary to the presence of the real body and real blood, that the bread and wine should be transubstantiated, so that Christ may be contained beneath the accidents; but while both bread and wine continue there, it can be said with truth, “this bread is my body, this wine is my blood,” and conversely. Thus will I understand this matter in honour of the holy words of God, which I will not allow to have violence done them by the petty reasonings of men, or to be distorted into meanings alien to them. I give leave, however, to others to follow the other opinion, which is distinctly laid down in the decretal, provided only (as I have said) they do not press us to accept their opinions as articles of faith.

The third bondage of this same sacrament is that abuse of it—and by far the most impious—by which it has come about that at this day there is no belief in the Church more generally received or more firmly held than that the mass is a good work and a sacrifice. This abuse has brought in an infinite flood of other abuses, until faith in the sacrament has been utterly lost, and they have made this divine sacrament a mere subject of traffic, huckstering, and money-getting contracts. Hence communions, brotherhoods, suffrages, merits, anniversaries, memorials, and other things of that kind are bought and sold in the Church, and made the subjects of bargains and agreements; and the entire maintenance of priests and monks depends upon these things.

I am entering on an arduous task, and it may perhaps be impossible to uproot an abuse which, strengthened by the practice of so many ages, and approved by universal consent, has fixed itself so firmly among us, that the greater part of the books which have influence at the present day must needs be done away with, and almost the entire aspect of the churches be changed, and a totally different kind of ceremonies be brought in, or rather, brought back. But my Christ lives, and we must take heed to the word of God with greater care, than to all the intellects of men and angels. I will perform my part, will bring forth the subject into the light, and will impart the truth freely and ungrudgingly as I have received it. For the rest, let every one look to his own salvation; I will strive, as in the

presence of Christ my judge, that no man may be able to throw upon me the blame of his own unbelief and ignorance of the truth.

Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar. To begin,—if we wish to attain safely and prosperously to the true and free knowledge of this sacrament, we must take the utmost care to put aside all that has been added by the zeal or the notions of men to the primitive and simple institution; such as vestments, ornaments, hymns, prayers, musical instruments, lamps, and all the pomp of visible things; and must turn our eyes and our attention only to the pure institution of Christ; and set nothing else before us but those very words of Christ, with which He instituted and perfected that sacrament, and committed it to us. In that word, and absolutely in nothing else, lies the whole force, nature, and substance of the mass. All the rest are human notions, accessory to the word of Christ; and the mass can perfectly well subsist and be kept up without them. Now the words in which Christ instituted this sacrament are as follows:—While they were at supper Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to His disciples, and said: “Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.” And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying: “Drink ye all of this; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; do this in remembrance of me.”

These words the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. xi.) also delivers to us and explains at greater length. On these we must rest, and build ourselves up as on a firm rock, unless we wish to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, as we have hitherto been, through the impious teachings of men who pervert the truth. For in these words nothing has been omitted which pertains to the completeness, use, and profit of this sacrament; and nothing laid down which it is superfluous or unnecessary for us to know. He who passes over these words in his meditations or teachings concerning the mass will teach monstrous impieties; as has been done by those who have made an *opus operatum* and a sacrifice of it.

Let this then stand as a first and infallible truth, that the mass or Sacrament of the Altar is the testament of Christ, which He left behind Him at His death, distributing an inheritance to those who believe in Him. For such are His words: “This cup is the new testament in my blood.” Let this truth, I say, stand as an immovable foundation, on which we shall erect all our arguments. You will see how we shall thus overthrow all the impious attacks of men on this sweetest sacrament. The truthful Christ, then, says with truth, that this is the new testament in His blood, shed for us. It is not without cause that I urge this; the matter is no small one, but must be received into the depths of our minds.

If then we enquire what a testament is, we shall also learn what the mass is; what are its uses, advantages, abuses. A testament is certainly a promise made by a man about to die, by which he assigns his inheritance and appoints heirs. Thus the idea of a testament implies, first, the death of the testator, and secondly, the promise of the inheritance, and the appointment of an heir. In this way Paul (Rom. iv.; Gal. iii., iv.; Heb. ix.) speaks at some length of testaments. We also see this clearly in those words of Christ. Christ testifies of His own death, when He says: “This is my body which is given; this is my



blood which is shed.” He assigns and points out the inheritance, when He says: “For the remission of sins.” And He appoints heirs when He says: “For you and for many;” that is, for those who accept and believe the promise of the testator; for it is faith which makes us heirs, as we shall see.

You see then that the mass—as we call it—is a promise of the remission of sins, made to us by God; and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the Son of God. For a promise and a testament only differ in this, that a testament implies the death of the promiser. A testator is a promiser who is about to die; and a promiser is, so to speak, a testator who is about to live. This testament of Christ was prefigured in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; yea! whatsoever value the ancient promises had, lay in that new promise which was about to be made in Christ, and on which they depended. Hence the words, “agreement, covenant, testament of the Lord,” are constantly employed in the Scriptures; and by these it was implied that God was about to die. “For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.” (Heb. ix. 16.) God having made a testament, it was necessary that He should die. Now He could not die, unless He became a man; and thus in this one word “testament” the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended.

From all this it is now self-evident what is the use, and what the abuse, of the mass; what is a worthy or an unworthy preparation for it. If the mass is a promise, as we have said, we can approach to it by no works, no strength, no merits, but by faith alone. For where we have the word of God who promises, there we must have faith on the part of man who accepts; and it is thus clear that the beginning of our salvation is faith, depending on the word of a promising God, who, independently of any efforts of ours, prevents us by His free and undeserved mercy, and holds out to us the word of His promise. “He sent His word and healed them.” (Ps. cvii. 20.) He did not receive our works and so save us. First of all comes the word of God; this is followed by faith, and faith by love, which in its turn does every good work, because it worketh no evil, yea, it is the fulfilling of the law. There is no other way in which man can meet or deal with God but by faith. It is not man by any works of his, but God, who by His own promise is the author of salvation; so that everything depends, is contained, and preserved in the word of His power, by which He begot us, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creation.

Thus, when Adam was to be raised up after the fall, God gave him a promise, saying to the serpent: “I will place enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; she shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise her heel.” In this word of promise, Adam with his posterity was, as it were, borne in the bosom of God, and preserved by faith in Him; waiting patiently for the woman who should bruise the head of the serpent, as God had promised. In this faith and waiting he died; not knowing when and how the promise would be accomplished, but not doubting that it would be accomplished. For such a promise, being the truth of God, preserves even in hell those who believe and wait for it. This promise was followed by another, made to Noah; the bow in the cloud being given as a sign of the covenant, believing in which he and his posterity found God propitious. After this, God promised to Abraham that in his seed all the kindreds of the earth should be blessed. This is that bosom of Abraham into which his

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

posterity have been received. Lastly to Moses, and to the children of Israel, especially to David, God gave a most distinct promise of Christ; and thus at length revealed what had been the meaning of the promise made to them of old time.

Thus we come to the most perfect promise of all, that of the new Testament, in which life and salvation are freely promised in plain words, and are bestowed on those who believe the promise. Christ conspicuously distinguishes this testament from the old one, by calling it the “New Testament.” The old testament given by Moses was a promise, not of remission of sins, nor of eternal blessings, but of temporal ones, namely, those of the land of Canaan; and by it no one could be renewed in spirit, and fitted to receive a heavenly inheritance. Hence it was necessary that, as a figure of Christ, an unreasoning lamb should be slain, in the blood of which the same testament was confirmed; thus, as is the blood, so is the testament; as is the victim, so is the promise. Now Christ says, “The new testament in my blood,” not in another’s, but in His own blood, by which grace is promised through the Spirit for the remission of sins, that we may receive the inheritance.

The mass then, as regards its substance, is properly nothing else than the aforesaid words of Christ, “Take, eat,” etc. He seems to say:—“Behold, O man, sinner and condemned as thou art, out of the pure and free love with which I love thee, according to the will of the Father of mercies, I promise to thee in these words, antecedently to any merits or prayers of thine, remission of all thy sins, and eternal life. That thou mayest be most certain of this, my irrevocable promise, I will confirm it by my very death; I will give my body and shed my blood, and will leave both to thee, as a sign and memorial of this very promise. As often as thou shalt receive them, remember me; declare and praise my love and bounty to thee; and give thanks.”

From this you see that nothing else is required for a worthy reception of the mass than faith, resting with confidence on this promise, believing Christ to be truthful in these words of His, and not doubting that these immeasurable blessings have been bestowed upon us. On this faith a spontaneous and most sweet affection of the heart will speedily follow, by which the spirit of the man is enlarged and enriched; that is, love, bestowed through the Holy Spirit on believers in Christ. Thus the believer is carried away to Christ, that bounteous and beneficent testator, and becomes altogether another and a new man. Who would not weep tears of delight, nay, almost die for joy in Christ, if he believed with unhesitating faith that this inestimable promise of Christ belongs to him? How can he fail to love such a benefactor, who of His own accord offers, promises, and gives the greatest riches and an eternal inheritance to an unworthy sinner, who has deserved very different treatment?

Our one great misery is this, that while we have many masses in the world, few or none of us recognise, consider, or apprehend the rich promises set before us in them. Now in the mass the one thing that demands our greatest, nay, our sole attention, is to keep these words and promises of Christ, which indeed constitute the mass itself, constantly before our eyes; that we should meditate on and digest them, and exercise, nourish, increase, and strengthen our faith in them by this daily commemoration. This is what Christ commands when He says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” It is the work of an evangelist faithfully

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

to present and commend that promise to the people and to call forth faith in it on their part. As it is—to say nothing of the impious fables of those who teach human traditions in the place of this great promise—how many are there who know that the mass is a promise of Christ? Even if they teach these words of Christ, they do not teach them as conveying a promise or a testament, and therefore call forth no faith in them.

It is a deplorable thing in our present bondage, that nowadays the utmost care is taken that no layman should hear those words of Christ, as if they were too sacred to be committed to the common people. We priests are so mad that we arrogate to ourselves alone the right of secretly uttering the words of consecration—as they are called; and that in a way which is unprofitable even to ourselves, since we never look at them as promises or a testament for the increase of faith. Under the influence of some superstitious and impious notion we do reverence to these words instead of believing them. In this our misery Satan so works among us that, while he has left nothing of the mass to the Church, he yet takes care that every corner of the earth shall be full of masses, that is, of abuses and mockeries of the testament of God; and that the world shall be more and more heavily loaded with the gravest sins of idolatry, to increase its greater damnation. For what more grievous sin of idolatry can there be, than to abuse the promises of God by our perverse notions, and either neglect or extinguish all faith in them.

God (as I have said) never has dealt, or does deal, with men otherwise than by the word of promise. Again, we can never deal with God otherwise than by faith in the word of His promise. He takes no heed of our works, and has no need of them,—though it is by these we deal with other men and with ourselves;—but He does require to be esteemed by us truthful in His promises, and to be patiently considered as such, and thus worshipped in faith, hope, and love. And thus it is that He is glorified in us, when we receive and hold every blessing not by our own efforts, but from His mercy, promise, and gift. This is that true worship and service of God, which we are bound to render in the mass. But when the words of the promise are not delivered to us, what exercise of faith can there be? And without faith who can hope? who can love? without faith, hope, and love, what service can there be? There is no doubt therefore that, at the present day, the whole body of priests and monks, with their bishops and all their superiors, are idolaters, and living in a most perilous state, through their ignorance, abuse, and mockery of the mass, or sacrament, or promise of God.

It is easy for any one to understand that two things are necessary at the same time, the promise and faith. Without a promise we have nothing to believe; while without faith the promise is useless, since it is through faith that it is established and fulfilled. Whence we easily conclude that the mass, being nothing else than a promise, can be approached and partaken of by faith alone; without which whatever prayers, preparations, works, signs, or gestures are practised, are rather provocations to impiety than acts of piety. It constantly happens that when men have given their attention to all these things they imagine that they are approaching the altar lawfully; and yet, in reality, could never be more unfit to approach it, because of the unbelief which they bring with them. What a number of sacrificing priests you may daily see everywhere, who if they have committed some trifling error, by unsuitable vestments, or unwashed hands, or by some hesitation in the

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

prayers, are wretched, and think themselves guilty of an immense crime! Meanwhile, as for the mass itself, that is, the divine promise, they neither heed nor believe it; yea, are utterly unconscious of its existence. O, unworthy religion of our age, the most impious and ungrateful of all ages!

There is then no worthy preparation for the mass, or rightful use of it, except faith, by which it is believed in as a divine promise. Wherefore let him who is about to approach the altar, or to receive the sacrament, take care not to appear before the Lord his God empty. Now he will be empty, if he has not faith in the mass, or New Testament; and what more grievous impiety can he commit against the truth of God than by this unbelief? As far as in him lies, he makes God a liar, and renders His promises idle. It will be safest then to go to the mass in no other spirit than that in which thou wouldst go to hear any other promise of God; that is, to be prepared, not to do many works, and bring many gifts, but to believe and receive all that is promised thee in that ordinance, or is declared to thee through the ministry of the priest as promised. Unless thou comest in this spirit, beware of drawing near; for thou wilt surely draw near unto judgment.

I have rightly said then, that the whole virtue of the mass consists in those words of Christ, in which He testifies that remission is granted to all who believe that His body is given and His blood shed for them. There is nothing then more necessary for those who are about to hear mass than to meditate earnestly and with full faith on the very words of Christ; for unless they do this, all else is done in vain. It is certainly true that God has ever been wont, in all His promises, to give some sign, token, or memorial of His promise; that it might be kept more faithfully and tell more strongly on men's minds. Thus when He promised to Noah that the earth should not be destroyed by another deluge, He gave His bow in the cloud, and said that He would thus remember His covenant. To Abraham, when He promised that his seed should inherit the earth, He gave circumcision as a seal of the righteousness which is by faith. Thus to Gideon He gave the dry and the dewy fleece, to confirm His promise of victory over the Midianites. Thus to Ahaz He gave a sign through Isaiah, to confirm his faith in the promise of victory over the kings of Syria and Samaria. We read in the Scriptures of many such signs of the promises of God.

So too in the mass, that first of all promises, He gave a sign in memory of so great a promise, namely, His own body and His own blood in the bread and wine, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." Thus in baptism He adds to the words of the promise the sign of immersion in water. Whence we see that in every promise of God two things are set before us, the word and the sign. The word we are to understand as being the testament, and the sign as being the sacrament; thus, in the mass, the word of Christ is the testament, the bread and wine are the sacrament. And as there is greater power in the word than in the sign, so is there greater power in the testament than in the sacrament. A man can have and use the word or testament without the sign or sacrament. "Believe," saith Augustine, "and thou hast eaten;" but in what do we believe except in the word of Him who promises? Thus I can have the mass daily, nay hourly; since, as often as I will, I can set before myself the words of Christ, and nourish and strengthen my faith in them; and this is in very truth the spiritual eating and drinking.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

Here we see how much the theologians of the Sentences have done for us in this matter. In the first place, not one of them handles that which is the sum and substance of the whole, namely, the testament and word of promise; and thus they do away with faith and the whole virtue of the mass. In the next place, the other part of it, namely, the sign or sacrament, is all that they deal with; but they do not teach faith even in this, but their own preparations, *opera operata*, participations and fruits of the mass. At length they have reached the very depth of error, and have involved themselves in an infinity of metaphysical triflings concerning transubstantiation and other points; so that they have done away with all faith, and with the knowledge and true use as well of the testament as of the sacrament; and have caused the people of Christ—as the prophet says—to forget their God for many days. But do thou leave others to recount the various fruits of hearing mass, and apply thy mind to saying and believing with the prophet, that God has prepared a table before thee in the presence of thine enemies—a table at which thy faith may feed and grow strong. Now it is only on the word of the divine promise that thy faith can feed; for man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matt. iv. 4.) Wherefore, in the mass, thou must look above all things most closely to the word of promise as to a most sumptuous banquet, full of every kind of food and holy nourishment for thy soul; this thou must esteem above all things; in this thou must place all thy trust, and cleave firmly to it, even in the midst of death and all thy sins. If thou dost this, thou wilt possess not only those drops as it were and littlenesses of the fruits of the mass, which some have superstitiously invented, but the main fount of life itself, namely, that faith in the word from which every good thing flows; as Christ said, “He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John vii. 38); and again, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John iv. 14.)

There are two difficulties which are wont to beset us, and prevent our receiving the benefits of the mass. The one is, that we are sinners and unworthy, from our utter vileness, of such great blessings. The other is—even if we were worthy—the very greatness of the blessings themselves, which are such that weak nature cannot dare to seek or hope for them. Who would not be struck in the first place with amazement rather than with the desire for the remission of sins and eternal life, if he rightly estimates the greatness of the blessings which come through these—namely, the having God as his Father, and being a child of God, and heir of all good things? To meet this double weakness of nature, thou must take hold of the word of Christ, and fix thine eyes much more strongly on it, than on these cogitations of thine own infirmity. For the works of the Lord are great, and He is mighty to give, beyond all that we can seek or comprehend. Indeed, unless His works surpassed our worthiness, our capacity, our whole comprehension, they would not be divine. Thus too Christ encourages us, saying: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke xii. 32.) This incomprehensible exuberance of God’s mercy, poured out on us through Christ, makes us, in our turn, to love Him above all things, to cast ourselves upon Him with the most perfect trust, to despise all things, and be ready to suffer all things for Him. Hence this sacrament has been rightly called the fountain of love.

Here we may draw an example from human affairs. If some very rich lord were to bequeath a thousand pieces of gold to any beggar, or even to an unworthy and bad servant, such a one would certainly demand and receive them confidently, without regard either to his own unworthiness or to the greatness of the legacy. If any one were to set these before him as objections, what do you think he would reply? He would certainly answer: “What is that to you? It is not by my deserving, nor by any right of my own, that I receive what I do receive. I know that I am unworthy of it, and that I am receiving much more than I deserve; nay, I have deserved the very contrary. But what I claim, I claim by right of a testament, and of the goodness of another; if it was not an unworthy act to leave such a legacy to me who am so unworthy, why should my unworthiness make me hesitate to accept it? Nay, the more unworthy I am, the more readily do I embrace this free favour from another.” With such reasonings we must arm our own consciences against all their scruples and anxieties, that we may hold this promise of Christ with unhesitating faith. We must give the utmost heed not to approach in any confidence in our own confessions, prayers, and preparations; we must despair of all these and come in a lofty confidence in the promise of Christ—since it is the word of promise which alone must reign here—and in pure faith, which is the one and sole sufficient preparation.

We see from all this, how great the wrath of God has been which has permitted our impious teachers to conceal from us the words of this testament, and thus, as far as in them lay, to extinguish faith itself. It is self-evident what must necessarily follow this extinction of faith, namely, the most impious superstitions about works. For when faith perishes and the word of faith is silent, then straightway works, and traditions of works, rise up in its place. By these we have been removed from our own land, as into bondage at Babylon, and all that was dear to us has been taken from us. Even thus it has befallen us with the mass, which, through the teaching of wicked men, has been changed into a good work, which they call *opus operatum*, and by which they imagine that they are all powerful with God. Hence they have gone to the extreme of madness; and, having first falsely affirmed that the mass is of avail through the force of the *opus operatum*, they have gone on to say, that even if it be hurtful to him who offers it impiously, yet it is none the less useful to others. On this basis they have established their applications, participations, fraternities, anniversaries, and an infinity of lucrative and gainful business of that kind.

You will scarcely be able to stand against these errors, many and strong as they are, and deeply as they have penetrated, unless you fix what has been said firmly in your memory, and give the most steadfast heed to the true nature of the mass. You have heard that the mass is nothing else than the divine promise or testament of Christ, commended to us by the sacrament of His body and blood. If this is true, you will see that it cannot in any way be a *work*, nor can any work be performed in it, nor can it be handled in any way but by faith alone. Now faith is not a work, but the mistress and life of all works. Is there any man so senseless as to call a promise he has received, or a legacy that has been bestowed on him, a good work done on his part towards the testator? What heir is there, who thinks that he is doing a service to his father when he receives the testamentary documents along with the inheritance bequeathed to him? Whence then this impious rashness of ours, that we come to receive the testament of God as if we were doing a good work towards Him?

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

Is not such ignorance of that testament, and such a state of bondage of that great sacrament, a grief beyond all tears? Where we ought to be grateful for blessings bestowed on us, we come in our pride to give what we ought to receive, and make a mockery, with unheard-of perversity, of the mercy of the Giver. We give to Him as a work of ours what we receive as a gift from Him; and we thus make the testator no longer the bestower of His good gifts on us, but the receiver of ours. Alas for such impiety!

Who has ever been so senseless as to consider baptism a good work? What candidate for baptism has ever believed he was doing a work which he might offer to God on behalf of himself and others? If then in one sacrament and testament there is no good work communicable to others, neither can there be any in the mass, which is itself nothing but a testament and a sacrament. Hence it is a manifest and impious error, to offer or apply the mass for sins, for satisfactions, for the dead, or for any necessities of our own or of others. The evident truth of this statement you will easily understand, if you keep closely to the fact, that the mass is a divine promise, which can profit no one, be applied to no one, be communicated to no one, except to the believer himself; and that solely by his own faith. Who can possibly receive or apply for another a promise of God, which requires faith on the part of each individual? Can I give another man the promise of God, if he does not believe it? or can I believe for another man? or can I make another believe? Yet all this I must be able to do if I can apply and communicate the mass to others; for there are in the mass only these two things, God's promise, and man's faith which receives that promise. If I can do all this, I can also hear and believe the gospel on behalf of other men, I can be baptized for another man, I can be absolved from sin for another man, I can partake of the Sacrament of the Altar for another man; nay, to go through the whole list of their sacraments, I can also marry for another man, be ordained priest for another man, be confirmed for another man, receive extreme unction for another man.

Why did not Abraham believe on behalf of all the Jews? Why was every individual Jew required to exercise faith in the same promise which Abraham believed? Let us keep to this impregnable truth:—where there is a divine promise, there every man stands for himself; individual faith is required; every man shall give account for himself, and shall bear his own burdens; as Christ says: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark xvi. 16.) Thus every man can make the mass useful only to himself, by his own faith, and can by no means communicate it to others; just as a priest cannot administer a sacrament to any man on behalf of another, but administers the same sacrament to each individual separately. The priests in their work of consecration and administration act as ministers for us; not that we offer up any good work through them, or communicate actively; but by their means we receive the promise and its sign, and communicate passively. This idea continues among the laity; for they are not said to do a good work, but to receive a gift. But the priests have gone after their own impieties and have made it a good work that they communicate and make an offering out of the sacrament and testament of God, whereas they ought to have received it as a good gift.

But you will say: “What? will you ever overthrow the practices and opinions which, for so many centuries, have rooted themselves in all the churches and monasteries; and all

that superstructure of anniversaries, suffrages, applications, and communications, which they have established upon the mass, and from which they have drawn the amplest revenues?" I reply: It is this which has compelled me to write concerning the bondage of the Church. For the venerable testament of God has been brought into a profane servitude to gain, through the opinions and traditions of impious men, who have passed over the Word of God, and have set before us the imaginations of their own hearts, and thus have led the world astray. What have I to do with the number or the greatness of those who are in error? Truth is stronger than all. If you can deny that Christ teaches that the mass is a testament and a sacrament, I am ready to justify those men. Again, if you can say that the man who receives the benefit of a testament, or who uses for this purpose the sacrament of promise, is doing a good work, I am ready and willing to condemn all that I have said. But since neither is possible, why hesitate to despise the crowd which hastens to do evil, whilst you give glory to God and confess His truth, namely, that all priests are perversely mistaken, who look on the mass as a work by which they may aid their own necessities, or those of others, whether dead or alive? My statements, I know, are unheard of and astounding. But if you look into the true nature of the mass, you will see that I speak the truth. These errors have proceeded from that over-security, which has kept us from perceiving that the wrath of God was coming upon us.

This I readily admit, that the prayers which we pour forth in the presence of God, when we meet to partake of the mass, are good works or benefits, which we mutually impart, apply, and communicate, and offer up for one another; as the Apostle James teaches us to pray for one another that we may be saved. Paul also exhorts that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority. (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.) These things are not the mass, but works of the mass;—if, indeed, we can call the prayers of our hearts and our lips works—because they spring from the existence and growth of faith in the sacrament. The mass or promise of God is not completed by our prayers, but only by our faith; and in faith we pray and do other good works. But what priest sacrifices with the intention and idea of only offering up prayers? They all imagine that they are offering Christ himself to God the Father as an all-sufficient victim; and that they are doing a good work on behalf of all men, who, as they allege, will profit by it. They trust in the *opus operatum*, and do not attribute the effect to prayer. Thus, by a gradual growth of error, they attribute to the sacrament the benefit which springs from prayer; and they offer to God what they ought to receive as a gift from Him.

We must therefore make a clear distinction between the testament and sacrament itself, and the prayers which we offer at the same time. And not only so, but we must understand that those prayers are of no value at all, either to him who offers them, or to those for whom they are offered, unless the testament has been first received by faith, so that the prayer may be that of faith, which alone is heard, as the Apostle James teaches us. So widely does prayer differ from the mass. I can pray for as many persons as I will; but no one receives the mass unless he believes for himself; and that only so far as he believes; nor can it be given either to God or to men, but it is God alone who by the ministry of the priest gives it to men, and they receive it by faith alone, without any works or merits. No one would be so audaciously foolish as to say that, when a poor and



*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

needy man comes to receive a benefit from the hand of a rich man, he is doing a good work. Now the mass is the benefit of a divine promise, held forth to all men by the hand of the priest. It is certain, therefore, that the mass is not a work communicable to others, but the object of each man's individual faith, which is thus to be nourished and strengthened.

We must also get rid of another scandal, which is a much greater and a very specious one; that is, that the mass is universally believed to be a sacrifice offered to God. With this opinion the words of the canon of the mass appear to agree, such as—"These gifts; these offerings; these holy sacrifices;" and again, "this oblation." There is also a very distinct prayer that the sacrifice may be accepted like the sacrifice of Abel. Hence Christ is called the victim of the altar. To this we must add the sayings of the holy Fathers, a great number of authorities, and the usage that has been constantly observed throughout the world.

To all these difficulties, which beset us so pertinaciously, we must oppose with the utmost constancy the words and example of Christ. Unless we hold the mass to be the promise or testament of Christ, according to the plain meaning of the words, we lose all the gospel and our whole comfort. Let us allow nothing to prevail against those words, even if an angel from heaven taught us otherwise. Now in these words there is nothing about a work or sacrifice. Again, we have the example of Christ on our side. When Christ instituted this sacrament and established this testament in the Last Supper, he did not offer himself to God the Father, or accomplish any work on behalf of others, but, as he sat at the table, he declared the same testament to each individual present and bestowed on each the sign of it. Now the more any mass resembles and is akin to that first mass of all which Christ celebrated at the Last Supper, the more Christian it is. But that mass of Christ was most simple; without any display of vestments, gestures, hymns, and other ceremonies; so that if it had been necessary that it should be offered as a sacrifice, His institution of it would not have been complete.

Not that any one ought rashly to blame the universal Church, which has adorned and extended the mass with many other rites and ceremonies; but we desire that no one should be so deceived by showy ceremonies, or so perplexed by the amount of external display, as to lose the simplicity of the mass, and in fact pay honour to some kind of transubstantiation; as will happen if we pass by the simple substance of the mass, and fix our minds on the manifold accidents of its outward show. For whatever has been added to the mass beyond the word and example of Christ, is one of its accidents; and none of these ought we to consider in any other light than we now consider monstrances—as they are called—and altar cloths, within which the host is contained. It is a contradiction in terms that the mass should be a sacrifice; since we receive the mass, but give a sacrifice. Now the same thing cannot be received and offered at the same time, nor can it be at once given and accepted by the same person. This is as certain as that prayer and the thing prayed for cannot be the same; nor can it be the same thing to pray and to receive what we pray for.

What shall we say then to the canon of the mass and the authority of the Fathers? First of all I reply:—If there were nothing to be said, it would be safer to deny their authority altogether, than to grant that the mass is a work or a sacrifice, and thus to deny the word of Christ and to overthrow faith and the mass together. However, that we may keep the Fathers too, we will explain (1 Cor. xi.) that the believers in Christ, when they met to celebrate the mass, were accustomed to bring with them portions of food and drink, called “collects,” which were distributed among the poor, according to the example of the Apostles (Acts iv.), and from which were taken the bread and wine consecrated for the sacrament. Since all these gifts were sanctified by the word and prayer after the Hebrew rite, in accordance with which they were lifted on high, as we read in Moses, the words and the practice of elevation, or of offering, continued in the Church long after the custom had died out of collecting and bringing together the gifts which were offered or elevated. Thus Hezekiah (Isaiah xxxvii. 4) bids Isaiah to lift his prayer for the remnant that is left. Again, the Psalmist says: “Lift up your hands to the holy place;” and—“To thee will I lift up my hands;” and again—“That men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands.” (1 Tim. ii. 8.) Hence the expressions “sacrifice” or “oblation” ought to be referred, not to the sacrament and testament, but to the “collects” themselves. Hence too the word collect has remained in use for the prayers said in the mass.

For the same reason the priest elevates the bread and the cup as soon as he has consecrated them; but the proof that he is not therein offering anything to God is that in no single word does he make mention of a victim or an oblation. This too is a remnant of the Hebrew rite, according to which it was customary to elevate the gifts which, after being received with giving of thanks, were brought back to God. Or it may be considered as an admonition to us, to call forth our faith in that testament which Christ on that occasion brought forward and set before us; and also as a display of its sign. The oblation of the bread properly corresponds to the words: “This is my body;” and Christ, as it were, addresses us bystanders by this very sign. Thus too the oblation of the cup properly corresponds to these words: “This cup is the New Testament in my blood.” The priest ought to call forth our faith by the very rite of elevation. And as he openly elevates the sign or sacrament in our sight, so I wish that he also pronounced the word or testament with loud and clear voice in our hearing; and that in the language of every nation, that our faith might be more efficaciously exercised. Why should it be lawful to perform mass in Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, and not also in German, or in any other language?

Wherefore, in this abandoned and most perilous age, let the priests who sacrifice take heed in the first place that those words of the major and minor canon, with the collects, which speak only too plainly of a sacrifice, are to be applied, not to the sacrament, but either to the consecration of the bread and wine themselves, or to their own prayers. For the bread and wine are presented beforehand to receive a blessing, that they may be sanctified by the word and prayer. But after being blessed and consecrated, they are no longer offered, but are received as a gift from God. And in this matter let the priest consider that the gospel is to be preferred to all canons and collects composed by men; but the gospel, as we have seen, does not allow the mass to be a sacrifice.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

In the next place, when the priest is performing mass publicly, let him understand that he is only receiving and giving to others the communion in the mass; and let him beware of offering up at the same moment his prayers for himself and others, lest he should seem to be presuming to offer the mass. The priest also who is saying a private mass must consider himself as administering the communion to himself. A private mass is not at all different from, nor more efficient than, the simple reception of the communion by any layman from the hand of the priest, except for the prayers, and that the priest consecrates and administers it to himself. In the matter itself of the mass and the sacrament, we are all equal, priests and laymen.

Even if he is requested by others to do so, let him beware of celebrating votive masses—as they are called—and of receiving any payment for the mass, or presuming to offer any votive sacrifice; but let him carefully refer all this to the prayers which he offers, whether for the dead or the living. Let him think thus:—I will go and receive the sacrament for myself alone, but while I receive it I will pray for this or that person, and thus, for purposes of food and clothing, receive payment for my prayers, and not for the mass. Nor let it shake thee in this view, though the whole world is of the contrary opinion and practice. Thou hast the most certain authority of the gospel, and relying on this, thou mayest easily condemn the ideas and opinions of men. If however, in despite of what I say, thou wilt persist in offering the mass, and not thy prayers only, then know that I have faithfully warned thee, and that I shall stand clear in the day of judgment, whilst thou wilt bear thine own sin. I have said what I was bound to say to thee, as a brother to a brother, for thy salvation; it will be to thy profit if thou take heed to my words, to thy hurt if thou neglect them. And if there are some who will condemn these statements of mine, I reply in the words of Paul: “Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” (2 Tim. iii. 13.)

Hence any one may easily understand that often-quoted passage from Gregory, in which he says that a mass celebrated by a bad priest is not to be considered of less value than one by a good priest, and that one celebrated by St. Peter would not have been better than one celebrated by the traitor Judas. Under cover of this saying some try to shelter their own impiety, and have drawn a distinction between the *opus operatum* and the *opus operans*; that they might continue secure in their evil living, and yet pretend to be benefactors to others. Gregory indeed speaks the truth, but these men pervert his meaning. It is most true that the testament and sacrament are not less effectively given and received at the hands of wicked priests than at those of the most holy. Who doubts that the gospel may be preached by wicked men? Now the mass is a part of the gospel; nay, the very sum and compendium of the gospel. For what is the whole gospel but the good news of the remission of sins? Now all that can be said in the most ample and copious words concerning the remission of sins and the mercy of God, is all briefly comprehended in the word of the testament. Hence also sermons to the people ought to be nothing else but expositions of the mass, that is, the setting forth of the divine promise of this testament. This would be to teach faith, and truly to edify the Church. But those who now expound the mass make a sport and mockery of the subject by figures of speech derived from human ceremonies.

As therefore a wicked man can baptize, that is, can apply the word of promise and the sign of water to the person baptized, so can he also apply and minister the promise of this sacrament to those who partake of it, and partake himself with them, as the traitor Judas did in the supper of the Lord. Still the sacrament and testament remains always the same; it performs in the believer its own proper work, in the unbeliever it performs a work foreign to itself. But in the matter of oblations the case is quite different; for since it is not the mass but prayers which are offered to God, it is evident that the oblations of a wicked priest are of no value. As Gregory himself says, when we employ an unworthy person as an advocate, the mind of the judge is prejudiced against us. We must not therefore confound these two things, the mass and prayer, sacrament and work, testament and sacrifice. The one comes from God to us through the ministry of the priest, and requires faith on our part; the other goes forth from our faith to God through the priest, and requires that He should hear us; the one comes down, the other goes upwards. The one therefore does not necessarily require that the minister should be worthy and pious, but the other does require it, because God does not hear sinners. He knows how to do us good by means of wicked men, but He does not accept the works of any wicked man, as He showed in the case of Cain. It is written: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.” (Prov. xv. 8); and again: “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” (Rom. xiv. 23.)

We shall now make an end of this first part of the subject, but I am ready to produce further arguments when any one comes forward to attack these. From all that has been said we see for whom the mass was intended, and who are worthy partakers of it; namely, those alone who have sad, afflicted, disturbed, confused, and erring consciences. For since the word of the divine promise in this sacrament holds forth to us remission of sins, any man may safely draw near to it who is harassed either by remorse for sin, or by temptation to sin. This testament of Christ is the one medicine for past, present, and future sins; provided thou cleavest to it with unhesitating faith, and believest that that which is signified by the words of the testament is freely given to thee. If thou dost not so believe, then nowhere, never, by no works, by no efforts, wilt thou be able to appease thy conscience. For faith is the sole peace of conscience, and unbelief the sole disturber of conscience.

## **CONCERNING THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to the riches of His mercy has at least preserved this one sacrament in His Church uninjured and uncontaminated by the devices of men, and has made it free to all nations and to men of every class. He has not suffered it to be overwhelmed with the foul and impious monstrosities of avarice and superstition; doubtless having this purpose, that He would have little children, incapable of avarice and superstition, to be initiated into this sacrament, and to be sanctified by perfectly simple faith in His word. To such, even at the present day, baptism is of the highest advantage. If this sacrament had been intended to be given to adults and those of full age, it seems as if it could have hardly preserved its efficacy and its glory, in the presence of that tyranny of avarice and superstition which has supplanted all divine ordinances among us. In this case too, no doubt, fleshly wisdom would have invented its preparations, its worthinesses, its reservations, its restrictions,

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

and other like nets for catching money; so that the water of baptism would be sold no cheaper than parchments are now.

Yet, though Satan has not been able to extinguish the virtue of baptism in the case of little children, still he has had power to extinguish it in all adults; so that there is scarcely any one nowadays who remembers that he has been baptized, much less glories in it; so many other ways having been found of obtaining remission of sins and going to heaven.

Occasion has been afforded to these opinions by that perilous saying of St. Jerome, either misstated or misunderstood, in which he calls penitence the second plank of safety after shipwreck; as if baptism were not penitence. Hence, when men have fallen into sin, they despair of the first plank, or the ship, as being no longer of any use, and begin to trust and depend only on the second plank, that is, on penitence. Thence have sprung those infinite loads of vows, religious dedications, works, satisfactions, pilgrimages, indulgences, and systems; and from them those oceans of books and of human questionings, opinions, and traditions, which the whole world nowadays cannot contain. Thus this tyranny possesses the Church of God in an incomparably worse form than it ever possessed the synagogue, or any nation under heaven.

It was the duty of Bishops to remove all these abuses, and to make every effort to recall Christians to the simplicity of baptism; that so they might understand their own position, and what as Christians they ought to do. But the one business of Bishops at the present day is to lead the people as far as possible away from baptism and to plunge them all under the deluge of their own tyranny; and thus, as the prophet says, to make the people of Christ forget Him for ever. Oh wretched men who are called by the name of Bishops! they not only do nothing and know nothing which Bishops ought, but they are even ignorant what they ought to know and do. They fulfil the words of Isaiah: “His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant; they are shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.” (Is. lvi. 10, 11.)

The first thing then we have to notice in baptism is the divine promise, which says: He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. This promise is to be infinitely preferred to the whole display of works, vows, religious orders, and whatever has been introduced by the invention of man. On this promise depends our whole salvation, and we must take heed to exercise faith in it, not doubting at all that we are saved, since we have been baptized. Unless this faith exists and is applied, baptism profits us nothing; nay, it is hurtful to us, not only at the time when it is received, but in the whole course of our after life. For unbelief of this kind charges the divine promise with falsehood; and to do this is the greatest of all sins. If we attempt this exercise of faith, we shall soon see how difficult a thing it is to believe this divine promise. For human weakness, conscious of its own sinfulness, finds it the most difficult thing in the world to believe that it is saved, or can be saved; and yet, unless it believes this, it cannot be saved, because it does not believe the divine truth which promises salvation.

This doctrine ought to have been studiously inculcated upon the people by preaching; this promise ought to have been perpetually reiterated; men ought to have been constantly reminded of their baptism; faith ought to have been called forth and nourished. When this

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

divine promise has been once conferred upon us, its truth continues even to the hour of our death; and thus our faith in it ought never to be relaxed, but ought to be nourished and strengthened even till we die, by a perpetual recollection of the promise made to us in baptism. Thus, when we rise out of our sins and exercise penitence, we are simply reverting to the efficacy of baptism and to faith in it, whence we had fallen; and we return to the promise then made to us, but which we had abandoned through our sin. For the truth of the promise once made always abides, and is ready to stretch out the hand and receive us when we return. This, unless I mistake, is the meaning of that obscure saying, that baptism is the first of sacraments and the foundation of them all, without which we can possess none of the others.

Thus it will be of no little profit to a penitent, first of all to recall to mind his own baptism, and to remember with confidence that divine promise which he had deserted; rejoicing that he is still in a fortress of safety, in that he has been baptized; and detesting his own wicked ingratitude in having fallen away from the faith and truth of baptism. His heart will be marvellously comforted, and encouraged to hope for mercy, if he fixes his eyes upon that divine promise once made to him, which could not lie, and which still continues entire, unchanged, and unchangeable by any sins of his; as Paul says: “If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” (2 Tim. ii. 13.) This truth of God will preserve him; and even if all other hopes perish, this, if he believes it, will not fail him. Through this truth he will have something to oppose to the insolent adversary; he will have a barrier to throw in the way of the sins which disturb his conscience; he will have an answer to the dread of death and judgment; finally, he will have a consolation under every kind of temptation, in being able to say: God is faithful to His promise; and in baptism I received the sign of that promise. If God is for me, who can be against me?

If the children of Israel, when returning to God in repentance, first of all called to mind their exodus from Egypt, and in remembrance of this turned back to God, who had brought them out—a remembrance which is so often inculcated on them by Moses, and referred to by David—how much more ought we to remember our exodus from Egypt, and in remembrance of it to return to Him who brought us out through the washing of the new birth. Now this we can do most advantageously of all in the sacrament of the bread and wine. So of old these three sacraments, penitence, baptism, and the bread, were often combined in the same act of worship; and the one added strength to the other. Thus we read of a certain holy virgin who, whenever she was tempted, relied on her baptism only for defence, saying, in the briefest words: “I am a Christian.” The enemy forthwith felt the efficacy of baptism, and of the faith which depended on the truth of a promising God, and fled from her.

We see then how rich a Christian, or baptized man, is; since, even if he would, he cannot lose his salvation by any sins however great, unless he refuses to believe; for no sins whatever can condemn him, but unbelief alone. All other sins, if faith in the divine promise made to the baptized man stands firm or is restored, are swallowed up in a moment through that same faith; yea, through the truth of God, because He cannot deny Himself, if thou confess Him, and cleave believingly to His promise. Whereas contrition,

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

and confession of sins, and satisfaction for sins, and every effort that can be devised by men, will desert thee at thy need, and will make thee more miserable than ever, if thou forgettest this divine truth and puffest thyself up with such things as these. For whatever work is wrought apart from faith in the truth of God is vanity and vexation of spirit.

We also see how perilous and false an idea it is that penitence is a second plank of refuge after shipwreck; and how pernicious an error it is to suppose that the virtue of baptism has been brought to an end by sin, and that this ship has been dashed to pieces. That ship remains one, solid, and indestructible, and can never be broken up into different planks. In it all are conveyed who are carried to the port of salvation, since it is the truth of God giving promises in the sacraments. What certainly does happen is that many rashly leap out of the ship into the sea and perish; these are they who abandon faith in the promise and rush headlong into sin. But the ship itself abides, and passes on safely in its course; and any man who, by the grace of God, returns to the ship, will be borne on to life, not on a plank, but on the solid ship itself. Such a man is he who returns by faith to the fixed and abiding promise of God. Thus Peter charges those who sin with having forgotten that they were purged from their old sins (2 Peter i. 9); doubtless meaning to reprove their ingratitude for the baptism they had received, and the impiety of their unbelief.

What profit then is there in writing so much about baptism, and yet not teaching faith in the promise? All the sacraments were instituted for the purpose of nourishing faith, and yet so far are they from attaining this object, that men are even found impious enough to assert that a man ought not to be sure of the remission of sins, or of the grace of the sacraments. By this impious doctrine they deprive the whole world of its senses, and utterly extinguish, or at least bring into bondage that sacrament of baptism, in which the first glory of our conscience stands. Meanwhile they senselessly persecute wretched souls with their contritions, their anxious confessions, their circumstances, satisfactions, works, and an infinity of such trifles. Let us then read with caution, or rather despise the Master of Sentences (Book iv.) with all his followers; who, when they write their best, write only about the matter and form of the sacraments, and so handle only the dead and perishing letter of those sacraments, while they do not even touch upon their spirit, life, and use; that is, the truth of the divine promise, and faith on our part.

See then that thou be not deceived by the display of works, and by the fallacies of human traditions, and so wrong the truth of God and thy own faith. If thou wilt be saved, thou must begin by faith in the sacraments, without any works. Thy faith will be followed by these very works, but thou must not hold faith cheap, for it is itself the most excellent and most difficult of all works, and by it alone thou wilt be saved, even if thou wert compelled to be destitute of all other works. For it is a work of God, not of man, as Paul teaches. All other works He performs with us, and by us; this one work He performs in us and without us.

From what has been said we may clearly distinguish the difference between man the minister and God the Author of baptism. Man baptizes and does not baptize; he baptizes, because he performs the work of dipping the baptized person; he does not baptize, because in this work he does not act upon his own authority, but in the place of God.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

Hence we ought to receive baptism from the hand of man just as if Christ Himself, nay, God Himself, were baptizing us with His own hands. For it is not a man's baptism, but that of Christ and God; though we receive it by the hand of a man. Even so any other creature which we enjoy through the hand of another is really only God's. Beware then of making any such distinction in baptism, as to attribute the outward rite to man, and the inward blessing to God. Attribute both of them to God alone, and consider the person of him who confers baptism in no other light than as the vicarious instrument of God, by means of which the Lord sitting in heaven dips thee in the water with His own hands, and promises thee remission of sins upon earth, speaking to thee with the voice of a man through the mouth of His minister.

The very words of the minister tell thee this, when he says: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." He does not say: "I baptize thee in my name;" but says, as it were: "What I do, I do not by my own authority, but in the place and in the name of God; and thou must look upon it as if the Lord Himself did it in visible shape. The Author and the minister are different, but the work of both is the same; nay, rather it is that of the Author alone through my ministry." In my judgment the expression, "In the name," relates to the person of the Author, so that not only is the name of the Lord brought forward and invoked in the doing of the work, but the work itself is performed, as being that of another, in the name and in the place of another. By the like figure Christ says: "Many shall come in my name." (Matt. xxiv. 5.) And again: "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name." (Rom. i. 5.)

I most gladly adopt this view; because it is a thing most full of consolation, and an effective aid to faith, to know that we have been baptized, not by a man, but by the very Trinity Itself through a man, who acts towards us in Its name. This brings to an end that idle contention which is carried on about the "form" of baptism—as they call the words themselves—the Greeks saying: "Let the servant of Christ be baptized;" the Latins: "I baptize." Others also, in their pedantic trifling, condemn the use of the expression: "I baptize thee in the name of Jesus Christ"—though it is certain that the Apostles baptized in this form, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles—and will have it that no other form is valid than the following: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." But they strive in vain; they prove nothing; they only bring forward their own dreams. In whatever manner baptism is administered, provided it is administered, not in the name of a man, but in the name of the Lord, it truly saves us. Nay, I have no doubt that if a man received baptism in the name of the Lord, even from a wicked minister who did not give it in the name of the Lord, he would still be truly baptized in the name of the Lord. For the efficacy of baptism depends not so much on the faith of him who confers it, as of him who receives it. Thus we read an instance of a certain player who was baptized in jest. These and similar narrow questions and disputes have been raised for us by those who attribute nothing to faith, and everything to works and ceremonies. On the contrary, we owe nothing to ceremonies, and everything to faith alone, which makes us free in spirit from all these scruples and fancies.



Another thing which belongs to baptism is the sign or sacrament, which is that dipping into water whence it takes its name. For in Greek to baptize signifies to dip, and baptism is a dipping. We have said already that, side by side with the divine promises, signs also are given us, to represent by a figure the meaning of the words of the promise; or, as the moderns say, the sacrament has an effectual significance. What that significance is we shall see. Very many have thought that in the word and the water there is some occult spiritual virtue, which works the grace of God in the soul of the recipient. Others deny this, and declare that there is no virtue in the sacraments, but that grace is given by God alone, who, according to His covenant, is present at the sacraments instituted by Himself. All however agree in this, that the sacraments are effectual signs of grace. They are led to this conclusion by this one argument, that it does not otherwise appear what pre-eminence the sacraments of the new law would have over those of the old, if they were only signs. Hence they have been driven to attribute such efficacy to the sacraments of the new law, that they have stated them to be profitable even to those who are in mortal sin; and have declared that neither faith nor grace are requisite, but that it is sufficient that we do not place any impediment in the way, that is, any actual purpose of sinning afresh.

We must carefully avoid and fly from these doctrines, for they are impious and unbelieving, repugnant to faith and to the nature of the sacraments. It is a mistake to suppose that the sacraments of the new law differ from the sacraments of the old law as regards the efficacy of their significance. Both are on an equality in their significance; for the same God who now saves us by baptism and the bread, saved Abel by his sacrifice, Noah by the Ark, Abraham by circumcision, and all the other Patriarchs by their own proper signs. There is no difference then between a sacrament of the old and of the new law, as regards their significance; provided we understand by the old law all the dealings of God with the Patriarchs and other Fathers in the time of the law. For those signs which were given to the Patriarchs and Fathers are completely distinct from the legal figures which Moses instituted in his law; such as the rites of the priesthood, in relation to vestments, vessels, food, houses, and the like. These are as different as possible, not only from the sacraments of the new law, but also from those signs which God gave from time to time to the Fathers who lived under the law; such as that given to Gideon in the fleece, to Manoah in his sacrifice; such also as that which Isaiah offered to Ahaz. In all these cases alike, some promise was given which required faith in God.

In this then the figures of the law differ from signs new or old, that the figures of the law have no word of promise annexed to them, requiring faith, and therefore are not signs of justification, inasmuch as they are not sacraments of faith, which alone justify, but only sacraments of works. Their whole force and nature lay in works, not in faith; for he who did them fulfilled them, even if his work was without faith. Now our signs or sacraments and those of the Fathers have annexed to them a word of promise, which requires faith, and can be fulfilled by no other work. Thus they are signs or sacraments of justification, because they are sacraments of justifying faith and not of works; so that their whole efficacy lies in faith itself, not in working. He who believes them fulfils them, even though he do no work. Hence the saying: It is not the sacrament, but faith in the sacrament which justifies. Thus circumcision did not justify Abraham and his seed; and yet the Apostle calls it a seal of the righteousness of faith, because faith in that promise

with which circumcision was connected did justify, and fulfilled the meaning of circumcision. Faith was that circumcision of the heart in spirit, which was figured by the circumcision of the flesh in the letter. Thus it was evidently not the sacrifice of Abel which justified him, but the faith by which he offered himself entirely to God; of which faith the outward sacrifice was a figure.

Thus it is not baptism which justifies any man, or is of any advantage; but faith in that word of promise to which baptism is added; for this justifies, and fulfils the meaning of baptism. For faith is the submerging of the old man, and the emerging of the new man. Hence it cannot be that the new sacraments differ from the ancient sacraments, for they both alike have divine promises and the same spirit of faith; but they differ incomparably from the ancient *figures*, on account of the word of promise, which is the sole and most effective means of difference. Thus at the present day the pomp of vestments, localities, meats, and an infinite variety of ceremonies, doubtless figure excellent works to be fulfilled in the spirit; and yet, since no word of divine promise is connected with them, they can in no way be compared with the signs of baptism and the bread. Nor can they justify men nor profit them in any way, since their fulfilment lies in the very practice or performance of them without faith; for when they are done or performed, they are fulfilled. Thus the Apostle speaks of those things, “which all are to perish with the using; after the commandments and doctrines of men.” (Col. ii. 22.) Now the sacraments are not fulfilled by being done, but by being believed.

Thus it cannot be true that there is inherent in the Sacraments a power effectual to produce justification, or that they are efficacious signs of grace. These things are said in ignorance of the divine promise and to the great detriment of faith; unless indeed we call them efficacious in this sense, that, if along with them there be unhesitating faith, they do confer grace most certainly and most effectually. But that it is not this kind of efficacy which those writers attribute to them is evident from this, that they assert them to be profitable to all men, even the wicked and unbelieving, provided they put no obstacle in the way; as if unbelief itself were not the most persistent of all obstacles, and the most hostile to grace. Thus they have endeavoured to make out of the sacrament a precept, and out of faith a work. For if a sacrament confers grace on me, merely because I receive it, then it is certainly by my own work and not by faith that I obtain grace; nor do I apprehend any promise in the sacrament, but only a sign instituted and commanded by God. It is evident from this how utterly the sacraments are misunderstood by these theologians of the Sentences, inasmuch as they make no account either of faith or of the promise in the sacraments, but cleave only to the sign and the use of the sign, and carry us away from faith to works, from the word to the sign. Thus, as I have said, they have not only brought the sacraments into bondage, but, as far as in them lay, have entirely done away with them.

Let us then open our eyes, and learn to look more to the word than the sign, more to faith than to the work or use of the sign; and let us understand that wherever there is a divine promise, there faith is required; and that both of these are so necessary that neither can be of any effect without the other. We can neither believe unless we have a promise, nor is the promise effectual unless it is believed; while if these two act reciprocally, they

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

produce a real and sure efficacy in the sacraments. Hence to seek efficacy in the sacrament independently of the promise and of faith is to strive in vain and to fall into condemnation. Thus Christ says: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark xvi. 16.) Thus He shows that in the sacrament faith is so necessary that it can save us even without the sacrament; and on this account when He says: “He that believeth not,” He does not add: “and is not baptized.”

Baptism then signifies two things, death and resurrection; that is, full and complete justification. When the minister dips the child into the water, this signifies death; when he draws him out again, this signifies life. Thus Paul explains the matter: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. vi. 4.) This death and resurrection we call a new creation, a regeneration, and a spiritual birth; and these words are not only to be understood allegorically, as they are by many, of the death of sin and the life of grace, but of a real death and resurrection. For baptism has no fictitious meaning, nor does sin die or grace rise fully within us, until the body of sin which we bear in this life is destroyed; for, as the Apostle says, as long as we are in the flesh, the desires of the flesh work in us and are worked upon. Hence when we begin to believe, we begin at the same time to die to this world, and to live to God in a future life; so that faith is truly a death and resurrection; that is, that spiritual baptism in which we are submerged and emerge.

When then the washing away of sins is attributed to baptism, it is rightly so attributed; but the meaning of the phrase is too slight and weak to fully express baptism, which is rather a symbol of death and resurrection. For this reason I could wish that the baptized should be totally immersed, according to the meaning of the word and the signification of the mystery; not that I think it necessary to do so, but that it would be well that so complete and perfect a thing as baptism should have its sign also in completeness and perfection, even as it was doubtless instituted by Christ. For a sinner needs not so much to be washed as to die, that he may be altogether renewed into another creature, and that there may thus be a correspondence in him to the death and resurrection of Christ along with whom he dies and rises again in baptism. For though we may say that Christ was washed from His mortality when He died and rose again, yet it is a weaker expression than if we said that He was totally changed and renewed; and so there is more intensity in saying that death and resurrection to eternal life are signified to us by baptism, than that we are washed from sin.

Here again we see that the sacrament of baptism, even in respect to the sign, is not the mere business of a moment, but has a lasting character. For though the transaction itself passes quickly, the thing signified by it lasts even until death, yea, till the resurrection at the last day. For as long as we live we are always doing that which is signified by baptism; that is, we are dying and rising again. We are dying, I say, not only in our affections and spiritually, by renouncing the sins and vanities of the world, but in very deed we are beginning to leave this bodily life and to apprehend the future life, so that there is a real (as they call it) and also a bodily passing out of this world to the Father.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

We must therefore keep clear of the error of those who have reduced the effect of baptism to such small and slender dimensions that, while they say that grace is infused by it, they assert that this grace is afterwards, so to speak, effused by sin; and that we must then go to heaven by some other way, as if baptism had now become absolutely useless. Do not thou judge thus, but understand that the significance of baptism is such that thou mayest live and die in it; and that neither by penitence nor by any other way canst thou do aught but return to the effect of baptism, and do afresh what thou wert baptized in order to do, and what thy baptism signified. Baptism never loses its effect, unless in desperation thou refuse to return to salvation. Thou mayst wander away for a time from the sign, but the sign does not on that account lose its effect. Thus thou hast been baptized once for all sacramentally, but thou needest continually to be baptized by faith, and must continually die and continually live. Baptism hath swallowed up thy whole body and given it forth again; and so the substance of baptism ought to swallow up thy whole life, in body and in soul, and to give it back in the last day, clothed in the robe of brightness and immortality. Thus we are never without the sign as well as the substance of baptism; nay, we ought to be continually baptized more and more, until we fulfil the whole meaning of the sign at the last day.

We see then that whatever we do in this life tending to the mortifying of the flesh and the vivifying of the spirit is connected with baptism; and that the sooner we are set free from this life, the more speedily we fulfil the meaning of our baptism; and the greater the sufferings we endure, the more happily do we answer the purpose of baptism. The Church was at its happiest in those days when martyrs were daily put to death and counted as sheep for the slaughter; for then the virtue of baptism reigned in the Church with full power, though now we have quite lost sight of it for the multitude of human works and doctrine. The whole life which we live ought to be a baptism, and to fulfil the sign or sacrament of baptism; since we have been set free from all other things and given up to baptism alone, that is, to death and resurrection.

To whom can we assign the blame that this glorious liberty of ours and this knowledge of baptism are nowadays in bondage, except only to the tyranny of the Roman Pontiff? He most of all men, as becomes a chief shepherd, ought to have been the preacher and the asserter of this liberty and this knowledge; as Paul says: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Cor. iv. 1.) But his sole object is to oppress us by his decrees and laws, and to ensnare us into bondage to his tyrannical power. Not to speak of the impious and damnable way in which the Pope fails to teach these mysteries, by what right, I ask, has he established laws over us? Who has given him authority to bring into bondage this liberty of ours, given us by baptism? One purpose, as I have said, we ought to carry out in our whole lives, namely, to be baptized, that is, to be mortified, and to live by faith in Christ. This faith alone ought to have been taught, above all by the chief shepherd. But now not a word is said about faith, but the Church is crushed by an infinite number of laws concerning works and ceremonies; the virtue and knowledge of baptism are taken away; the faith of Christ is hindered.

I say then, neither Pope, nor bishop, nor any man whatever has the right of making one syllable binding on a Christian man, unless it is done with his own consent. Whatever is

done otherwise is done in a spirit of tyranny; and thus the prayers, fastings, almsgiving, and whatever else the Pope ordains and requires in the whole body of his decrees, which are as many as they are iniquitous, he has absolutely no right to require and ordain; and he sins against the liberty of the Church as often as he attempts anything of the kind. Hence it has come to pass that while the churchmen of the present day are strenuous defenders of church liberty, that is, of wood, stone, fields, and money (for in this day things ecclesiastical are synonymous with things spiritual), they yet, by their false teaching, not only bring into bondage the true liberty of the Church, but utterly destroy it; yea, more than the Turk himself could; contrary to the mind of the Apostle, who says: “Be not ye the servants of men.” (1 Cor. vii. 23.) We are indeed made servants of men, when we are subjected to their tyrannical ordinances and laws.

This wicked and flagitious tyranny is aided by the disciples of the Pope, who distort and pervert to this end the saying of Christ: “He who heareth you heareth me.” They swell out these words into a support for their own traditions; whereas this saying was addressed by Christ to the Apostles when they were going forth to preach the gospel, and therefore ought to be understood as referring to the gospel alone. These men, however, leave the gospel out of sight, and make this saying fit in with their own inventions. Christ says: “My sheep hear my voice, but they know not the voice of strangers.” For this cause the gospel was bequeathed to us, that the pontiffs might utter the voice of Christ; but they utter their own voice, and are determined to be heard. The Apostle also says of himself that he was not sent to baptize, but to preach the gospel; and thus no man is bound to receive the traditions of the pontiff, or to listen to him, except when he teaches the gospel and Christ; and he himself ought to teach nothing but the freest faith. Since, however, Christ says: “he who hears you hears me,” why does not the Pope also hear others? Christ did not say to Peter alone: “he who hears thee.” Lastly, where there is true faith, there must also of necessity be the word of faith. Why then does not the unbelieving Pope listen to his believing servant who has the word of faith? Blindness, blindness reigns among the pontiffs.

Others however, far more shamelessly, arrogate to the Pope the power of making laws; arguing from the words: “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. xvi. 19.) Christ is speaking there of the binding and loosing of sins, not of bringing the whole Church into bondage and making laws to oppress it. Thus the papal tyranny acts in all things on its own false maxims; while it forcibly wrests and perverts the words of God. I admit indeed that Christians must endure this accursed tyranny, as they would any other violence inflicted on them by the world, according to the saying of Christ: “Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matt. v. 39.) But I complain of this, that wicked pontiffs boast that they have a rightful power to act thus, and pretend that in this Babylon of theirs they are providing for the interests of Christendom; an idea which they have persuaded all men to adopt. If they did these things in conscious and avowed impiety and tyranny, or if it were simple violence that we endured, we might meanwhile quietly reckon up the advantages thus afforded us for the mortification of this life and the fulfilment of baptism, and should retain the full right of glorying in conscience at the wrong done us. As it is, they desire so to ensnare our

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

consciences in the matter of liberty that we should believe all that they do to be well done, and should think it unlawful to blame or complain of their iniquitous actions. Being wolves, they wish to appear shepherds; being antichrists, they wish to be honoured like Christ.

I cry aloud on behalf of liberty and conscience, and I proclaim with confidence that no kind of law can with any justice be imposed on Christians, whether by men or by angels, except so far as they themselves will; for we are free from all. If such laws are imposed on us, we ought so to endure them as still to preserve the consciousness of our liberty. We ought to know and steadfastly to protest that a wrong is being done to that liberty, though we may bear and even glory in that wrong; taking care neither to justify the tyrant nor to murmur against the tyranny. “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (1 Peter iii. 13.) All things work together for good to the elect of God. Since, however, there are but few who understand the glory of baptism and the happiness of Christian liberty, or who can understand them for the tyranny of the Pope—I for my part will set free my own mind and deliver my conscience, by declaring aloud to the Pope and to all papists, that, unless they shall throw aside all their laws and traditions, and restore liberty to the churches of Christ, and cause that liberty to be taught, they are guilty of the death of all the souls which are perishing in this wretched bondage, and that the papacy is in truth nothing else than the kingdom of Babylon and of very Antichrist. For who is the man of sin and the son of perdition, but he who by his teaching and his ordinances increases the sin and perdition of souls in the Church; while he yet sits in the Church as if he were God? All these conditions have now for many ages been fulfilled by the papal tyranny. It has extinguished faith, darkened the sacraments, crushed the gospel; while it has enjoined and multiplied without end its own laws, which are not only wicked and sacrilegious, but also most unlearned and barbarous.

Behold then the wretchedness of our bondage. “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her.” (Lam. i. 1, 2.) There are at this day so many ordinances, so many rites, so many parties, so many professions, so many works to occupy the minds of Christians, that they forget their baptism. For this multitude of locusts, caterpillars, and cankerworms, no man is able to remember that he was baptized, or what it was that he obtained in baptism. We ought to have been like babes when they are baptized, who, being preoccupied by no zeal and by no works, are free for all things, at rest and safe in the glory of their baptism alone. We also ourselves are babes in Christ, unremittingly baptized.

In opposition to what I have said, an argument will perhaps be drawn from the baptism of infants, who cannot receive the promise of God, or have faith in their baptism; and it will be said that therefore either faith is not requisite, or infants are baptized in vain. To this I reply, what all men say, that infants are aided by the faith of others, namely, that of those who bring them to baptism. For as the word of God, when it is preached, is powerful enough to change the heart of a wicked man, which is not less devoid of sense and feeling than any infant, so through the prayers of the Church which brings the child in faith, to

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

which prayers all things are possible, the infant is changed, cleansed, and renewed by faith infused into it. Nor should I doubt that even a wicked adult, if the Church were to bring him forward and pray for him, might undergo a change in any of the sacraments; just as we read in the gospel that the paralytic man was healed by the faith of others. In this sense too I should readily admit that the sacraments of the new law are effectual for the bestowal of grace, not only on those who do not place any obstacle in the way, but on the most obstinate of those who do. What difficulty cannot the faith of the Church and the prayer of faith remove, when Stephen is believed to have converted the Apostle Paul by this power? But in these cases the sacraments do what they do, not by their own virtue, but by that of faith; without which, as I have said, they have no effect at all.

A question has been raised whether a child yet unborn, but of which only a hand or a foot appears, can be baptized. On this point I would give no hasty judgment, and I confess my own ignorance. Nor do I know whether the reason on which they base their opinion is sufficient, namely, that the whole soul exists in every part of the body; for it is not the soul, but the body, which is outwardly baptized. On the other hand, I cannot pronounce that, as some assert, he who has not yet been born, cannot be born again; though it is a very strong argument. I leave this question to the decision of the Spirit, and meanwhile would have every man to be fully persuaded in his own mind.

I will add one thing, of which I wish I could persuade every one; that is, that all vows, whether those of religious orders, or of pilgrimages, or of works of any kind, should be entirely done away with, or at least avoided, and that we should remain in the liberty of baptism, full as it is of religious observances and of good works. It is impossible to express to what an extent this far too much extolled belief in vows detracts from baptism, and obscures the knowledge of Christian liberty; not to mention the unspeakable and infinite danger to souls which is daily increased by this immoderate passion for vows, and thoughtless rashness in making them. Oh ye most wicked Bishops and most unhappy pastors, who slumber at your ease and disport yourselves with your own desires, while ye have no pity for the grievous and perilous affliction of Joseph!

It would be well either to do away by a general edict with all vows, especially those which are perpetual, and to recall all men to their baptismal vows, or at least to admonish all to take no vow rashly; and not only to invite no vows, but to place delays and difficulties in the way of their being taken. We make an ample vow at baptism, a greater one than we can fulfil; and we shall have enough to do if we give all our efforts to this alone. But now we compass sea and land to make many proselytes; we fill the world with priests, monks, and nuns; and we imprison all these in perpetual vows. We shall find those who will argue on this point, and lay it down that works performed under the sanction of a vow are better than those performed independently of vows, and will be preferred in heaven and meet with far higher reward. Blind and impious Pharisees! who measure righteousness and holiness by the greatness and number of works, or by some other quality in them; while in God's sight they are measured by faith alone; since in His sight there is no difference between works, except so far as there is a difference in faith.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

By this inflated talk wicked men create a great opinion of their own inventions, and puff up human works, in order to allure the senseless multitude, who are easily led by a specious show of works; to the great ruin of faith, forgetfulness of baptism, and injury to Christian liberty. As a vow is a sort of law and requires a work, it follows that, as vows are multiplied, so laws and works are multiplied; and by the multiplication of these, faith is extinguished, and the liberty of baptism is brought into bondage. Not content with these impious allurements, others go further, and assert that entrance into a religious order is like a new baptism, which may be successively renewed, as often as the purpose of a religious life is renewed. Thus these devotees attribute to themselves alone righteousness, salvation, and glory, and leave to the baptized absolutely no room for comparison with them. The Roman pontiff, that fountain and author of all superstitions, confirms, approves, and embellishes these ideas by grandly worded bulls and indulgences; while no one thinks baptism worthy even of mention. By these showy displays they drive the easily led people of Christ into whatever whirlpools of error they will; so that, unthankful for their baptism, they imagine that they can do better by their works than others by their faith.

Wherefore God also, who is froward with the froward, resolving to avenge Himself on the pride and unthankfulness of these devotees, causes them either to fail in keeping their vows, or to keep them with great labour and to continue immersed in them, never becoming acquainted with the grace of faith and of baptism. As their spirit is not right with God, He permits them to continue to the end in their hypocrisy, and to become at length a laughing-stock to the whole world, always following after righteousness, and never attaining to it; so that they fulfil that saying: "Their land also is full of idols." (Is. ii. 8.)

I should certainly not forbid or object to any vow which a man may make of his own private choice. I do not wish altogether to condemn or depreciate vows; but my advice would be altogether against the public establishment or confirmation of any such mode of life. It is enough that every man should be at liberty to make private vows at his own peril; but that a public system of living under the constraint of vows should be inculcated, I consider to be a thing pernicious to the Church and to all simple souls. In the first place, it is not a little repugnant to the Christian life, inasmuch as a vow is a kind of ceremonial law, and a matter of human tradition or invention; from all which the Church has been set free by baptism, since the Christian is bound by no law, except that of God. Moreover there is no example of it in the Scriptures, especially of the vow of perpetual chastity, obedience, and poverty. Now a vow of which we have no example in the Scriptures is a perilous one, which ought to be urged upon no man, much less be established as a common and public mode of life; even if every individual must be allowed to venture upon it at his own peril, if he will. There are some works which are wrought by the Spirit in but few, and these ought by no means to be brought forward as an example, or as a manner of life.

I greatly fear, however, that these systems of living under vows in the religious, are of the number of those things of which the Apostle foretold: "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to



*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

be received with thanksgiving.” (1 Tim. iv. 2, 3.) Let no one cite against me the example of St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Dominic, and such like authors or supporters of religious orders. God is terrible and wonderful in His dealings with the children of men. He could preserve Daniel, Ananias, Azarias, and Misael holy, even as ministers of the kingdom of Babylon, that is, in the very midst of wickedness; He may also have sanctified the men of whom I have spoken in their perilous mode of life, and have guided them by the special working of His Spirit; while yet He would not have this made an example for other men. It is certain that not one of these men was saved by his vows or his religious order, but by faith alone, by which all men are saved, but to which these showy servitudes of vows are especially hostile.

In this matter let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. I shall carry out my undertaking, and speak on behalf of the liberty of the Church and of the glory of baptism; and I shall state for the general benefit what I have learnt under the teaching of the Spirit. And first I counsel those who are in high places in the Church to do away with all those vows and the practice of living under vows, or, at the least, not to approve or extol them. If they will not do this, then I earnestly advise all who desire to make their salvation the safer—particularly growing youths and young men—to keep aloof from all vows, especially from such as are extensive and life-long. I give this advice in the first place because this mode of life, as I have already said, has no evidence or example in the Scriptures, but rests only on the bulls of the pontiffs, who are but men; and secondly, because it tends to lead men into hypocrisy through its singularity and showy appearance, whence arise pride and contempt of the ordinary Christian life. If there were no other cause for doing away with these vows, this one by itself would have weight enough, that by them faith and baptism are depreciated, and works are magnified. Now these cannot be magnified without ruinous consequences, for among many thousands there is scarcely one who does not look more to his works as a member of a religious order, than to faith; and under this delusion they claim superiority over each other as being stricter or laxer, as they call it.

Hence I advise no man, yea, I dissuade every man from entering into the priesthood or any religious order, unless he be so fortified with knowledge as to understand that, however sacred and lofty may be the works of priests or of the religious orders, they differ not at all in the sight of God from the works of a husbandman labouring in his field, or of a woman attending to her household affairs, but that in His eyes all things are measured by faith alone; as it is written: “In all thy work believe with the faith of thy soul, for this is the keeping of the commandments of God.” (Eccles. xxxii. 23.) Nay, it very often happens that the common work of a servant or a handmaiden is more acceptable to God than all the fastings and works of a monk or a priest, when they are done without faith. Since, then, it is likely that at the present day vows only tend to increase men’s pride and presumption in their own works, it is to be feared that there is nowhere less of faith and of the Church than in priests, monks, and bishops; and that these very men are really Gentiles and hypocrites, who consider themselves to be the Church, or the very heart of the Church, spiritual persons, and rulers of the Church, when they are very far indeed from being so. These are really the people of the captivity,

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

among whom all the free gifts bestowed in baptism have been brought into bondage; while the poor and slender remnant of the people of the land appear vile in their eyes.

From this we perceive two conspicuous errors on the part of the Roman Pontiff. The first is, that he gives dispensations in the matter of vows, and does this as if he alone possessed authority beyond all other Christians. So far does the rashness and audacity of wicked men extend. If a vow can be dispensed with, any brother can dispense for his neighbour, or even for himself. If he cannot grant such dispensations, neither has the Pope any right to do so. Whence has he this authority? From the keys? They are common to all, and only have power over sins. But since the Pope himself confesses that vows have a divine right, why does he cheat and ruin wretched souls by giving dispensations in a matter of divine right, which admits of no dispensation? He prates of the redemption of vows, and declares that he has power to change vows, just as under the law of old the first-born of an ass was exchanged for a lamb; as if a vow, which requires to be fulfilled everywhere and constantly, were the same thing with the first-born of an ass; or as if, because God in His own law ordered an ass to be exchanged for a lamb, therefore the Pope, who is but a man, had the same power with respect to a law which is not his, but God's. It was not a pope who made this decretal, but an ass which had been exchanged for a pope, so utterly mad and impious was he.

The Pope commits a second great error again, in decreeing that the bond of marriage may be broken through, if one of the parties, even against the will of the other, desires to enter a monastery, provided the marriage has not yet been consummated. What devil inspires this portentous decree of the Pope? God commands men to keep faith and observe truth towards one another, and that every man should bring gifts out of his own substance; for He hates robbery for burnt-offering, as He declares by the mouth of Isaiah. Now husband and wife owe fidelity to each other by their compact, a fidelity which can be dissolved by no law. Neither can say: "I belong to myself," or can do without robbery whatever is done against the will of the other. Else why not also have a rule that a man who is in debt, if he enter into a religious order, shall be freed from his debts, and be at liberty to deny his bond? Ye blind! ye blind! Which is greater—good faith, which is a command of God, or a vow, invented and chosen by men? Art thou a shepherd of souls, O Pope? Are ye doctors of sacred theology, who teach in this way? Why do ye teach thus? Because ye extol a vow as being a better work than marriage; but it is not faith, which itself alone can magnify anything, that ye magnify, but works, which in the sight of God are nothing, or at least all equal as concerns their merit.

I cannot doubt then that from such vows as it is right to make, neither men nor angels can give a dispensation. But I have not been able to convince myself that all the vows made in these days fall under the head of rightful vows; such as that ridiculous piece of folly, when parents devote their child yet unborn, or an infant, to a life of religion or to perpetual chastity. Nay it is certain that this is no rightful vow; it appears to be a mockery of God, since the parents vow what it is in no wise in their power to perform. I come now to members of the religious orders. The more I think of their three vows, the less I understand them, and the more I wonder how the exaction of such vows has grown upon us. Still less do I understand at what period of life such vows can be taken, so as to be

legitimate and valid. In this all are agreed, that such vows, taken before the age of puberty, are not valid. And yet in this matter they deceive a great number of youths, who know as little of their own age as of what it is they are vowing. The age of puberty is not looked to when the vows are taken, but consent is supposed to follow afterwards, and the professed are held in bondage and devoured by dreadful scruples of conscience; as if a vow in itself void could become valid by the progress of time.

To me it seems folly that any limit to a legitimate vow should be laid down by others, who cannot lay one down in their own case. Nor do I see why a vow made in a man's eighteenth year should be valid, but not if made in his tenth or twelfth year. It is not enough to say that in his eighteenth year a man feels the impulses of the flesh. What if he scarcely feels them in his twentieth or thirtieth year; or feels them more strongly in his thirtieth year than in his twentieth? Why, again, is not a similar limitation placed on the vows of poverty and obedience? What time shall we assign for a man to feel himself avaricious or proud, when even the most spiritually minded men have a difficulty in detecting these affections in themselves? There will never be any sure and legitimate vow, until we shall have become thoroughly spiritual, and so have no need of vows. We see then that vows are most uncertain and perilous things. It would be a salutary course to leave this lofty manner of living under vows free to the spirit alone, as it was of old, and by no means to convert it into a perpetual mode of life. We have now, however, said enough on the subject of baptism and liberty. The time will perhaps come for treating more fully of vows, and in truth they greatly need to be treated of.

### **CONCERNING THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE**

In this third part I shall speak of the sacrament of penance. By the tracts and disputations which I have published on this subject I have given offence to very many, and have amply expressed my own opinions. I must now briefly repeat these statements, in order to unveil the tyranny which attacks us on this point as unsparingly as in the sacrament of the bread. In these two sacraments gain and lucre find a place, and therefore the avarice of the shepherds has raged to an incredible extent against the sheep of Christ; while even baptism, as we have seen in speaking of vows, has been sadly obscured among adults, that the purposes of avarice might be served.

The first and capital evil connected with this sacrament is, that they have totally done away with the sacrament itself, leaving not even a vestige of it. Whereas this, like the other two sacraments, consists of the word of the divine promise on one side and of our faith on the other, they have overthrown both of these. They have adapted to the purposes of their own tyranny Christ's word of promise, when He says: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 19); and: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 18); and again: "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John xx. 23.) These words are meant to call forth the faith of penitents, that they may seek and obtain remission of their sins. But these men, in all their books, writings, and discourses, have not made it their object to

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

explain to Christians the promise conveyed in these words, and to show them what they ought to believe, and how much consolation they might have, but to establish in the utmost length, breadth and depth their own powerful and violent tyranny. At last some have even begun to give orders to the angels in heaven, and to boast, with an incredible frenzy of impiety, that they have received the right to rule in heaven and on earth, and have the power of binding even in heaven. Thus they say not a word about the saving faith of the people, but talk largely of the tyrannical power of the pontiffs; whereas Christ's words do not deal at all with power, but entirely with faith.

It was not principalities, powers, and dominions that Christ instituted in His Church, but a ministry, as we learn from the words of the Apostle: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Cor. iv. 1.) When Christ said: "Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved," He meant to call forth faith on the part of those seeking baptism; so that, on the strength of this word of promise, a man might be sure that, if he believed and were baptized, he would obtain salvation. No sort of power is here bestowed on His servants, but only the ministry of baptism is committed to them. In the same way, when Christ says: "Whatsoever ye shall bind," etc., He means to call forth the faith of the penitent, so that, on the strength of this word of promise, he may be sure that, if he believes and is absolved, he will be truly absolved in heaven. Evidently nothing is said here of power, but it is the ministry of absolution which is spoken of. It is strange enough that these blind and arrogant men have not arrogated to themselves some tyrannical power from the terms of the baptismal promise. If not, why have they presumed to do so from the promise connected with penitence? In both cases there is an equal ministry, a like promise, and the same character in the sacrament; and it cannot be denied that, if we do not owe baptism to Peter alone, it is a piece of impious tyranny to claim the power of the keys for the Pope alone.

Thus also when Christ says: "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you; this is the cup in my blood," He means to call forth faith in those who eat, that their conscience may be strengthened by faith in these words, and that they may feel sure that, when they believe eat, they receive remission of sins. There is nothing here which speaks of power, but only of a ministry. The promise of Baptism has remained with us, at least in the case of infants, but the promise of the Bread and the Cup has been destroyed, or brought into servitude to avarice, and faith has been turned into a work and a testament into a sacrifice. Thus also the promise of Penance has been perverted into a most violent tyranny, and into the establishment of a dominion that is more than temporal.

Not content with this, our Babylon has so utterly done away with faith as to declare with shameless front that it is not necessary in this sacrament; nay, in her antichristian wickedness, she pronounces it a heresy to assert the necessity of faith. What more is there that that tyranny could do, and has not done? Verily "by the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof." (Psalm cxxxvii. 1, 2.) May the Lord curse the barren willows of those rivers! Amen. The promise and faith having been blotted out and overthrown, let us see what they have substituted for them. They have divided penitence into three parts, contrition, confession, and satisfaction; but in doing this they have taken

away all that was good in each of these, and have set up in each their own tyranny and caprice.

In the first place, they have so taught contrition as to make it prior to faith in the promise, and far better as not being a work of faith, but a merit; nay, they make no mention of faith. They stick fast in works and in examples taken from the Scriptures, where we read of many who obtained pardon through humility and contrition of heart, but they never think of the faith which wrought this contrition and sorrow of heart; as it is written concerning the Ninevites: “The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth.” (Jonah iii. 5.) These men, worse and more audacious than the Ninevites, have invented a certain “attrition,” which, by the virtue of the keys (of which they are ignorant), may become contrition; and this they bestow on the wicked and unbelieving, and thus do away entirely with contrition. O unendurable wrath of God, that such things should be taught in the Church of Christ! So it is that, having got rid of faith and its work, we walk heedlessly in the doctrines and opinions of men, or rather perish in them. A contrite heart is a great matter indeed, and can only proceed from an earnest faith in the Divine promises and threats—a faith which, contemplating the unshakeable truth of God, makes the conscience to tremble, terrifies and bruises it, and, when it is thus contrite, raises it up again, consoles, and preserves it. Thus, the truth of the threatening is the cause of contrition, and the truth of the promise is the cause of consolation, when they are believed; and by this faith a man merits remission of sins. Therefore faith above all things ought to be taught and called forth; when faith is produced, contrition and consolation will follow of their own accord by an inevitable consequence.

Hence, although there is something in the teaching of those who assert that contrition is to be brought about by the collection—as they call it—and contemplation of our own sins, still theirs is a perilous and perverse doctrine, because they do not first teach the origin and cause of contrition, namely, the unshakeable truth of the Divine threatenings and promises, in order to call forth faith; that so men might understand that they ought to look with much more earnest attention to the truth of God, by which to be humbled and raised up again, than to the multitude of their own sins, which, if they be looked at apart from the truth of God, are more likely to renew and increase the desire for sin, than to produce contrition. I say nothing of that insurmountable chaos of labour which they impose upon us, namely, that we are to frame a contrition for all our sins, for this is impossible. We can know but a small part of our sins; indeed even our good works will be found to be sins; as it is written: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” (Psalm cxliiii. 2.) It is enough that we sorrow for those sins which vex our conscience at the present moment, and which are easily recognised by an effort of our memory. He who is thus disposed will without doubt be ready to feel sorrow and fear on account of all his sins, and will feel sorrow and fear when in future they are revealed to him.

Beware then of trusting in thine own contrition, or attributing remission of sins to thy own sorrow. It is not because of these that God looks on thee with favour, but because of the faith with which thou hast believed His threatenings and promises, and which has wrought that sorrow in thee. Therefore whatever good there is in penitence is due, not to

the diligence with which we reckon up our sins, but to the truth of God and to our faith. All other things are works and fruits which follow of their own accord, and which do not make a man good, but are done by a man who has been made good by his faith in the truth of God. Thus it is written: “Because he was wroth, there went up a smoke in his presence.” (Psalm xviii. 8.) The terror of the threatening comes first, which devours the wicked; but faith, accepting the threatening, sends forth contrition as a cloud of smoke.

Contrition, though it has been completely exposed to wicked and pestilent doctrines, has yet given less occasion to tyranny and the love of gain. But confession and satisfaction have been turned into the most noted workshops for lucre and ambition. To speak first of confession. There is no doubt that confession of sins is necessary, and is commanded by God. “They were baptized of John in Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Matt. iii. 6.) “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John i. 9, 10.) If the saints must not deny their sin, how much more ought those who are guilty of great or public offences to confess them. But the most effective proof of the institution of confession is given when Christ tells us that an offending brother must be told of his fault, brought before the Church, accused, and finally, if he neglect to hear the Church, excommunicated. He “hears” when he yields to reproof, and acknowledges and confesses his sin.

The secret confession, however, which is now practised, though it cannot be proved from Scripture, is in my opinion highly satisfactory, and useful or even necessary. I could not wish it not to exist; nay, I rejoice that it does exist in the Church of Christ, for it is the one great remedy for afflicted consciences; when, after laying open our conscience to a brother, and unveiling all the evil which lay hid there, we receive from the mouth of that brother the word of consolation sent forth from God; receiving which by faith we find peace in a sense of the mercy of God, who speaks to us through our brother. What I protest against is the conversion of this institution of confession into a means of tyranny and extortion by the bishops. They reserve certain cases to themselves as secret, and then order them to be revealed to confessors named by themselves, and thus vex the consciences of men; filling the office of bishop, but utterly neglecting the real duties of a bishop, which are, to preach the gospel and to minister to the poor. Nay, these impious tyrants principally reserve to themselves the cases which are of less consequence, while they leave the greater ones everywhere to the common herd of priests,—cases such as the ridiculous inventions of the bull “In Cœna Domini.” That their wicked perverseness may be yet more manifest, they do not reserve those things which are offences against the worship of God, against faith, and against the chief commandments, but even approve and teach them; such as those journeyings hither and thither on pilgrimage, the perverted worship of saints, the lying legends of saints, the confidence in and practice of works and ceremonies; by all which things the faith of God is extinguished, and idolatry is nourished, as it is at this day. The pontiffs we have nowadays are such as those whom Jeroboam established at Dan and Beersheba as ministers of the golden calves—men who are ignorant of the law of God, of faith, and of all that concerns the feeding of the sheep of Christ, and who only thrust their own inventions upon the people by terror and power.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

Although I exhort men to endure the violence of these reservers, even as Christ bids us to endure all the tyrannical conduct of men, and teaches us to obey such extortioners; still I neither admit nor believe that they have any right of reservation. By no jot or tittle can they prove this; while I can prove the contrary. In the first place, if, in speaking of public offences, Christ says that we have gained our brother, if he hears us when told of his fault, and that he is not to be brought before the Church, unless he has refused to hear us, and that offences may thus be set right between brethren; how much more true will it be concerning private offences, that the sin is taken away, when brother has voluntarily confessed it to brother, so that he need not bring it before the Church, that is, before a prelate or priest, as these men say in their foolish interpretation. In support of my opinion we have again the authority of Christ, when he says in the same passage: “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. xviii. 18.) This saying is addressed to all Christians and to every Christian. Once more he says to the same effect: “Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. xviii. 19.) Now a brother, laying open his secret sins to a brother and seeking pardon, certainly agrees on earth with that brother in the truth, which is Christ. In confirmation of what he had said before, Christ says still more clearly in the same passage: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. xviii. 20.)

From all this I do not hesitate to say that whosoever voluntarily confesses his sins privately, in the presence of any brother, or, when told of his faults, asks pardon and amends his life, is absolved from his secret sins, since Christ has manifestly bestowed the power of absolution on every believer in Him, with whatever violence the pontiffs may rage against this truth. Add also this little argument, that, if any reservation of hidden sins were valid, and there could be no salvation unless they were remitted, the greatest hindrance to salvation would lie in those things which I have mentioned above—even those good works and idolatries which we are taught at the present day by the pontiffs. While, if these most weighty matters are not a hindrance, with how much less reason are those lighter offences so foolishly reserved! It is by the ignorance and blindness of the pastors that these portents are wrought in the Church. Wherefore I would warn these princes of Babylon and bishops of Beth-aven to abstain from reserving cases of any kind whatever, but to allow the freest permission to hear confessions of secret sins to all brethren and sisters; so that the sinner may reveal his sin to whom he will, with the object of seeking pardon and consolation, that is, the word of Christ uttered by the mouth of his neighbour. They effect nothing by their rash presumption, but to ensnare needlessly the consciences of the weak, to establish their own wicked tyranny, and to feed their own avarice on the sins and perdition of their brethren. Thus they stain their hands with the blood of souls, and children are devoured by their parents, and Ephraim devours Judah, and Syria Israel, as Isaiah says.

To these evils they have added circumstances—mothers, daughters, sisters, relatives, branches, fruits of sins, all devised at complete leisure by the most subtle of men, who have set up, even in the matter of sins, a sort of tree of consanguinity and affinity. So fertile of results are ignorance and impiety; for these devices of some worthless fellow

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

have passed into public law, as has happened in many other cases. So vigilantly do the shepherds watch over the Church of Christ, that whatever dreams of superstition or of new works these senseless devotees indulge, they forthwith bring forward, and dress them up with indulgences, and fortify them with bulls. So far are they from prohibiting these things, and protecting the simplicity of faith and liberty for the people of God; for what has liberty to do with the tyranny of Babylon?

I should advise the total neglect of all that concerns circumstances. Among Christians there is but one circumstance, and that is, that a brother has sinned. No character is to be compared to Christian brotherhood; nor has the observation of places, times, days, and persons, or any other such superstitious exaggeration, any effect but to magnify things which are nothing, at the expense of those things which are everything. As if there could be anything greater or more weighty than the glory of Christian brotherhood, they so tie us down to places and days and persons, that the name of brother is held cheap, and instead of being freemen we are slaves in bondage—we to whom all days, places, persons, and all other outward things, are equal.

How unworthily they have treated the matter of satisfaction. I have abundantly shown in the case of indulgences. They have abused it notably, to the destruction of Christians in body and in soul. In the first place, they have so taught it that the people have not understood the real meaning of satisfaction, which is a change of life. Furthermore, they so urge it and represent it as necessary, that they leave no room for faith in Christ; but men's consciences are most wretchedly tortured by scruples on this point. One runs hither, another thither; one to Rome, another into a convent, another to some other place; one scourges himself with rods, another destroys his body with vigils and fasting; while all, under one general delusion, say: Here is Christ, or there; and imagine that the kingdom of God, which is really within us, will come with observation. These monstrous evils we owe to thee, See of Rome, and to thy homicidal laws and rites, by which thou hast brought the world to such a point of ruin, that they think they can make satisfaction to God for their sins by works, while it is only by the faith of a contrite heart that He is satisfied. This faith thou not only compellest to silence in the midst of these tumults, but strivest to destroy, only in order that thy avarice, that insatiable leech, may have some to whom to cry: Bring, bring; and may make a traffic of sins.

Some have even proceeded to such a length in framing engines of despair for souls, as to lay it down that all sins, the satisfaction enjoined for which has been neglected, must be gone over afresh in confession. What will not such men dare, men born for this end, to bring everything ten times over into bondage? Moreover, I should like to know how many people there are who are fully persuaded that they are in a state of salvation, and are making satisfaction for their sins, when they murmur over the prayers enjoined by the priest with their lips alone, and meanwhile do not even think of any amendment of life. They believe that by one moment of contrition and confession their whole life is changed, and that there remains merit enough over and above to make satisfaction for their past sins. How should they know better, when they are taught nothing better? There is not a thought here of mortification of the flesh; the example of Christ goes for nothing; who, when he absolved the woman taken in adultery, said to her: "Go, and sin no more;"



thereby laying on her the cross of mortification of the flesh. No slight occasion has been given to these perverted ideas by our absolving sinners before they have completed their satisfaction; whence it comes that they are more anxious about completing their satisfaction, which is a thing that lasts, than about contrition, which they think has been gone through in the act of confession. On the contrary, absolution ought to follow the completion of satisfaction, as it did in the primitive Church, whence it happened that, the work being over, they were afterwards more exercised in faith and newness of life. On this subject, however, it must suffice to have repeated so far what I have said at greater length in writing on indulgences. Let it also suffice for the present to have said this much in the whole respecting these three sacraments, which are treated of and not treated of in so many mischievous books of Sentences and of law. It remains for me to say a few words about the remaining sacraments also, that I may not appear to have rejected them without sufficient reason.

### **OF CONFIRMATION.**

It is surprising that it should have entered any one's mind to make a Sacrament of Confirmation out of that laying on of hands which Christ applied to little children, and by which the apostles bestowed the Holy Spirit, ordained presbyters, and healed the sick; as the Apostle writes to Timothy: "Lay hands suddenly on no man." (1 Tim. v. 22.) Why not also make a confirmation out of the sacrament of bread, because it is written: "And when he had received meat, he was strengthened" (Acts ix. 19); or again: "Bread which strengtheneth man's heart?" (Ps. civ. 15.) Thus confirmation would include three sacraments, of bread, of orders, and of confirmation itself. But if whatever the apostles did is a sacrament, why has not preaching rather been made into a sacrament?

I do not say this, because I condemn the seven sacraments, but because I deny that they can be proved from the Scriptures. I wish there were in the Church such a laying on of hands as there was in the time of the Apostles, whether we chose to call it confirmation or healing. As it is, however, none of it remains, except so much as we have ourselves invented in order to regulate the duties of the bishops, that they may not be entirely without work in the Church. For when they had left the sacraments which involved labour, along with the word, to their inferiors, as being beneath their attention (on the ground, forsooth, that whatever institutions the Divine majesty has set up must needs be an object of contempt to men), it was but right that we should invent some easy duty, not too troublesome for the daintiness of these great heroes, and by no means commit it to inferiors, as if it were of little importance. What human wisdom has ordained ought to be honoured by men. Thus, such as the priests are, such should be the ministry and office which they hold. For what is a bishop who does not preach the gospel, or attend to the cure of souls, but an idol in the world, having the name and form of a bishop?

At present, however, we are enquiring into the sacraments of divine institution; and I can find no reason for reckoning confirmation among these. To constitute a sacrament we require in the very first place a word of divine promise, on which faith may exercise itself. But we do not read that Christ ever gave any promise respecting confirmation, although he himself laid hands upon many, and although he mentions among the signs

that should follow them that believe: “They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” (Mark xvi. 18.) No one, however, has interpreted these words of a sacrament, or could do so. It is enough then to consider confirmation as a rite or ceremony of the Church; of like nature to those other ceremonies by which water and other things are consecrated. For if every other creature is sanctified by the word and prayer, why may not man much more be sanctified by the same means, even though they cannot be called sacraments of faith, inasmuch as they contain no divine promise? Neither do these work salvation; while sacraments save those who believe in the divine promise.

## **OF MATRIMONY.**

It is not only without any warrant of Scripture that matrimony is considered a sacrament, but it has been turned into a mere mockery by the very same traditions which vaunt it as a sacrament. Let us look a little into this. I have said that in every sacrament there is contained a word of divine promise, which must be believed in by him who receives the sign; and that the sign alone cannot constitute a sacrament. Now we nowhere read that he who marries a wife will receive any grace from God; neither is there in matrimony any sign of divine institution, nor do we anywhere read that it was appointed of God to be a sign of anything; although it is true that all visible transactions may be understood as figures and allegorical representations of invisible things. But figures and allegories are not sacraments, in the sense in which we are speaking of sacraments.

Furthermore, since matrimony has existed from the beginning of the world, and still continues even among unbelievers, there are no reasons why it should be called a sacrament of the new law, and of the Church alone. The marriages of the patriarchs were not less marriages than ours, nor are those of unbelievers less real than those of believers; and yet no one calls them a sacrament. Moreover there are among believers wicked husbands and wives, worse than any Gentiles. Why should we then say there is a sacrament here, and not among the Gentiles? Shall we so trifle with baptism and the Church as to say, like those who rave about the temporal power existing only in the Church, that matrimony is a sacrament only in the Church? Such assertions are childish and ridiculous, and by them we expose our ignorance and rashness to the laughter of unbelievers.

It will be asked however: Does not the Apostle say that “they two shall be one flesh,” and that “this is a great sacrament;” and will you contradict the plain words of the Apostle? I reply that this argument is a very dull one, and proceeds from a careless and thoughtless reading of the original. Throughout the holy Scriptures this word “*sacramentum*,” has not the meaning in which we employ it, but an opposite one. For it everywhere signifies, not the sign of a sacred thing, but a sacred thing which is secret and hidden. Thus Paul says: “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries (that is, sacraments) of God.” (1 Cor. iv. 1.) Where we use the Latin term “sacrament,” in Greek the word “mystery” is employed; and thus in Greek the words of the Apostle are: “They two shall be one flesh; this is a great mystery.” This ambiguity has led men to consider marriage as a sacrament of the new law, which they would have been far from doing, if they had read the word “mystery,” as it is in the Greek.

Thus the Apostle calls Christ himself a “sacrament,” saying: “And without controversy great is the sacrament (that is, mystery) of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (1 Tim. iii. 16.) Why have they not deduced from this an eighth sacrament of the new law, under such clear authority from Paul? Or, if they restrained themselves in this case, where they might so suitably have been copious in the invention of sacraments, why are they so lavish of them in the other? It is because they have been misled by their ignorance as well of things as of words; they have been caught by the mere sound of the words and by their own fancies. Having once, on human authority, taken a sacrament to be a sign, they have proceeded, without any judgment or scruple, to make the word mean a sign, wherever they have met with it in the sacred writings. Just as they have imported other meanings of words and human habits of speech into the sacred writings, and transformed these into dreams of their own, making anything out of anything. Hence their constant senseless use of the words: good works, bad works, sin, grace, righteousness, virtue, and almost all the most important words and things. They use all these at their own discretion, founded on the writings of men, to the ruin of the truth of God and of our salvation.

Thus sacrament and mystery, in Paul’s meaning, are the very wisdom of the Spirit, hidden in a mystery, as he says: “Which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Cor. ii. 8.) There remains to this day this folly, this stone of stumbling and rock of offence, this sign which shall be spoken against. Paul calls preachers the stewards of these mysteries, because they preach Christ, the power and wisdom of God; but so preach him that unless men believe, they cannot understand. Thus a sacrament means a mystery and a hidden thing, which is made known by words, but is received by faith of heart. Such is the passage of which we are speaking at present: “They two shall be one flesh; this is a great mystery.” These men think that this was said concerning matrimony; but Paul brings in these words in speaking of Christ and the Church, and explains his meaning clearly by saying: “I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” See how well Paul and these men agree! Paul says that he is setting forth a great mystery concerning Christ and the Church; while they set it forth as concerning male and female. If men may thus indulge their own caprices in interpreting the sacred writings, what wonder if anything can be found in them, were it even a hundred sacraments?

Christ then and the Church are a mystery, that is, a great and hidden thing, which may indeed and ought to be figured by matrimony, as in a sort of real allegory; but it does not follow that matrimony ought to be called a sacrament. The heavens figuratively represent the apostles; the sun Christ; the waters nations; but these things are not therefore sacraments; for in all these cases the institution is wanting and the divine promise; and these it is which make a sacrament complete. Hence Paul is either, of his own spirit, applying to Christ the words used in Genesis concerning matrimony, or else he teaches that, in their general sense, the spiritual marriage of Christ is also there declared, saying: “Even as the Lord cherisheth the Church; for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak

concerning Christ and the Church.” (Eph. v. 29–32.) We see that he means this whole text to be understood as spoken by him about Christ. He purposely warns the reader to understand the “Sacrament” as in Christ and the Church, not in matrimony.

I admit, indeed, that even under the old law, nay, from the beginning of the world, there was a sacrament of penitence; but the new promise of penitence and the gift of the keys are peculiar to the new law. As we have baptism in the place of circumcision, so we now have the keys in the place of sacrifices or other signs of penitence. I have said above that, at different times, the same God has given different promises and different signs for the remission of sins and the salvation of men, while yet it is the same grace that all have received. As it is written: “We, having the same spirit of faith, believe, and therefore speak.” (2 Cor. iv. 13.) “Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.” (1 Cor. x. 3, 4.) “These all died in faith, not having received the promises; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (Heb. xi. 13, 40.) For Christ himself, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, is the head of his Church from the beginning even to the end of the world. There are then different signs, but the faith of all believers is the same; since without faith it is impossible to please God, and by it Abel pleased Him.

Let then matrimony be a figure of Christ and the Church, not however a sacrament divinely instituted, but one invented in the Church by men led astray by their ignorance alike of things and of words. So far as this invention is not injurious to the faith, it must be borne with in charity; just as many other devices of human weakness and ignorance are borne with in the Church, so long as they are not injurious to faith and to the sacred writings. But we are now contending for the firmness and purity of faith and of Scripture; lest, if we affirm anything to be contained in the sacred writings and in the articles of our faith, and it is afterwards proved not to be so contained, we should expose our faith to mockery, be found ignorant of our own special business, cause scandal to our adversaries and to the weak, and fail to exalt the authority of holy Scripture. For we must make the widest possible distinction between those things which have been delivered to us from God in the sacred writings, and those which have been invented in the Church by men, of however eminent authority from their holiness and their learning.

Thus far I have spoken of matrimony itself. But what shall we say of those impious human laws by which this divinely appointed manner of life has been entangled and tossed up and down? Good God! it is horrible to look upon the temerity of the tyrants of Rome, who thus, according to their own caprices, at one time annul marriages and at another time enforce them. Is the human race given over to their caprice for nothing but to be mocked and abused in every way, and that these men may do what they please with it for the sake of their own fatal gains?

There is a book in general circulation and held in no slight esteem, which has been confusedly put together out of all the dregs and filth of human traditions, and entitled the Angelic Summary; while it is really a more than diabolical summary. In this book, among an infinite number of monstrous statements, by which confessors are supposed to be

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

instructed, while they are in truth most ruinously confused, eighteen impediments to matrimony are enumerated. If we look at these with the just and free eye of faith, we shall see that the writer is of the number of those of whom the Apostle foretold that they should “give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; forbidding to marry.” (1 Tim. iv. 1–3.) What is forbidding to marry, if this is not forbidding it—to invent so many impediments, and to set so many snares, that marriages cannot be contracted, or, if they are contracted, must be dissolved? Who has given this power to men? Granted that such men have been holy and led by a pious zeal; why does the holiness of another encroach upon my liberty? Why does the zeal of another bring me into bondage? Let whosoever will be as holy and as zealous as he will, but let him not injure others, or rob me of my liberty.

I rejoice, however, that these disgraceful laws have at length attained the glory they deserve, in that by their aid the men of Rome have nowadays become common traders. And what do they sell? The shame of men and women; a merchandise worthy of these traffickers, who surpass all that is most sordid and disgusting in their avarice and impiety. There is not one of those impediments, which cannot be removed at the intercession of Mammon; so that these laws seem to have been made for no other purpose than to be nets for money and snares for souls in the hands of those greedy and rapacious Nimrods; and in order that we might see in the holy place, in the Church of God, the abomination of the public sale of the shame and ignominy of both sexes. A business worthy of our pontiffs, and fit to be carried on by men who, with the utmost disgrace and baseness, are given over to a reprobate mind, instead of that ministry of the gospel which, in their avarice and ambition, they despise.

But what am I to say or do? If I were to enter upon every particular, this treatise would extend beyond all bounds; for the subject is in the utmost confusion, so that no one can tell where he is to begin, how far he is to go, or where he is to stop. This I know, that no commonwealth can be prosperously administered by mere laws. If the magistrate is a wise man, he will govern more happily under the guidance of nature than by any laws; if he is not a wise man, he will effect nothing but mischief by laws, since he will not know how to use them, or to adapt them to the wants of the time. In public matters, therefore, it is of more importance that good and wise men should be at the head of affairs, than that any laws should be passed; for such men will themselves be the best of laws, since they will judge cases of all kinds with energy and justice. If, together with natural wisdom, there be learning in divine things, then it is clearly superfluous and mischievous to have any written laws; and charity above all things has absolutely no need of laws. I say, however, and do all that in me lies, admonishing and entreating all priests and friars, if they see any impediment with which the Pope can dispense, but which is not mentioned in Scripture, to consider all those marriages valid which have been contracted, in whatever way, contrary to ecclesiastical or pontifical laws. Let them arm themselves with the Divine law which says: What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. The union of husband and wife is one of divine right, and holds good, however much against the laws of men it may have taken place, and the laws of men ought to give place to it, without any scruple. For if a man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, how much more ought he to tread under foot the frivolous and unjust laws of men, that he

may cleave to his wife? If the Pope, or any bishop or official, dissolves any marriage, because it has been contracted contrary to the papal laws, he is an antichrist, does violence to nature, and is guilty of treason against God; because this sentence stands: Whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Besides this, man has no right to make such laws, and the liberty bestowed on Christians through Christ is above all the laws of men, especially when the divine law comes in, as Christ says: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” (Mark ii. 27–28.) Again, such laws were condemned beforehand by Paul, when he foretold that those should arise who would forbid to marry. Hence in this matter all those rigorous impediments derived from spiritual affinity, or legal relationship and consanguinity, must give way, as far as is permitted by the sacred writings, in which only the second grade of consanguinity is prohibited, as it is written in the book of Leviticus, where twelve persons are prohibited, namely:—mother, step-mother, full sister, half sister by either parent, grand-daughter, father’s sister, mother’s sister, daughter-in-law, brother’s wife, wife’s sister, step-daughter, uncle’s wife. In these only the first grade of affinity and the second of consanguinity are prohibited, and not even these universally, as is clear when we look carefully at the subject; for the daughter and grand-daughter of a brother and sister are not mentioned as prohibited, though they are in the second grade. Hence, if at any time a marriage has been contracted outside these grades, than which no others have ever been prohibited by God’s appointment, it ought by no means to be dissolved on account of any laws of men. Matrimony, being a divine institution, is incomparably above all laws, and therefore it cannot rightfully be broken through for the sake of laws, but rather laws for its sake.

Thus all those fanciful spiritual affinities of father, mother, brother, sister, or child, ought to be utterly done away with in the contracting of matrimony. What but the superstition of man has invented that spiritual relationship? If he who baptizes is not permitted to marry her whom he has baptized, or a godfather his god-daughter, why is a Christian man permitted to marry a Christian woman? Is the relationship established by a ceremony or by the sign of the sacrament stronger than that established by the substance itself of the sacrament? Is not a Christian man the brother of a Christian sister? Is not a baptized man the spiritual brother of a baptized woman? How can we be so senseless? If a man instructs his wife in the gospel and in the faith of Christ, and thus becomes truly her father in Christ, shall it not be lawful for her to continue his wife? Would not Paul have been at liberty to marry a maiden from among those Corinthians, all of whom he declares that he had begotten in Christ? See, then, how Christian liberty has been crushed by the blindness of human superstition!

Much more idle still is the doctrine of legal relationship; and yet they have raised even this above the divine right of matrimony. Nor can I agree to that impediment which they call disparity of religion, and which forbids a man to marry an unbaptized woman, neither simply, nor on condition of converting her to the faith. Who has prohibited this, God or man? Who has given men authority to prohibit marriages of this kind? Verily the spirits that speak lies in hypocrisy, as Paul says; of whom it may be truly said: The wicked have

spoken lies to me, but not according to thy law. Patricius, a heathen, married Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, who was a Christian; why should not the same thing be lawful now? A like instance of foolish, nay wicked rigour is the impediment of crime; as when a man marries a woman previously polluted by adultery, or has plotted the death of a woman's husband, that he may be able to marry her. Whence, I ask, a severity on the part of men against men, such as even God has never exacted? Do these men pretend not to know that David, a most holy man, married Bathsheba the wife of Uriah, though both these crimes had been committed; that is, though she had been polluted by adultery and her husband had been murdered? If the divine law did this, why do tyrannical men act thus against their fellow servants?

It is also reckoned as an impediment when there exists what they call a bond; that is, when one person is bound to another by betrothal. In this case they conclude that if either party have subsequently had intercourse with a third, the former betrothal comes to an end. I cannot at all receive this doctrine. In my judgment, a man who has bound himself to one person is no longer at his own disposal, and therefore, under the prohibitions of the divine right, owes himself to the former, though he has not had intercourse with her, even if he have afterwards had intercourse with another. It was not in his power to give what he did not possess; he has deceived her with whom he has had intercourse, and has really committed adultery. That which has led some to think otherwise is that they have looked more to the fleshly union than to the divine command, under which he who has promised fidelity to one person is bound to observe it. He who desires to give, ought to give of that which is his own. God forbid that any man should go beyond or defraud his brother in any matter; for good faith ought to be preserved beyond and above all traditions of all men. Thus I believe that such a man cannot with a safe conscience cohabit with a second woman, and that this impediment ought to be entirely reversed. If a vow of religion deprives a man of his power over himself, why not also a pledge of fidelity given and received; especially since the latter rests on the teaching and fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v.), while the former rests on human choice? And if a wife may return to her husband, notwithstanding any vow of religion she may have made, why should not a betrothed man return to his betrothed, even if connexion with another have followed? We have said, however, above that a man who has pledged his faith to a maiden is not at liberty to make a vow of religion, but is bound to marry her, because he is bound to keep his faith, and is not at liberty to abandon it for the sake of any human tradition, since God commands that it should be kept. Much more will it be his duty to observe his pledge to the first to whom he has given it, because it was only with a deceitful heart that he could give it to a second; and therefore he has not really given it, but has deceived his neighbour, against the law of God. Hence the impediment called that of error takes effect here, and annuls the marriage with the second woman.

The impediment of holy orders is also a mere contrivance of men, especially when they idly assert that even a marriage already contracted is annulled by this cause, always exalting their own traditions above the commands of God. I give no judgment respecting the order of the priesthood, such as it is at the present day; but I see that Paul commands that a bishop should be the husband of one wife, and therefore the marriage of a deacon, of a priest, of a bishop, or of a man in any kind of orders, cannot be annulled; although

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

Paul knew nothing of that kind of priests and those orders which we have at the present day. Perish then these accursed traditions of men, which have come in for no other end than to multiply perils, sins, and evils in the Church! Between a priest and his wife, then, there is a true and inseparable marriage, approved by the divine command. What if wicked men forbid or annul it of their own mere tyranny? Be it that it is unlawful in the sight of men; yet it is lawful in the sight of God, whose commandment, if it be contrary to the commandments of men, is to be preferred.

Just as much a human contrivance is the so-called impediment of public propriety, by which contracted marriages are annulled. I am indignant at the audacious impiety which is so ready to separate what God has joined together. You may recognise Antichrist in this opposition to everything which Christ did or taught. What reason is there, I ask, why, on the death of a betrothed husband before actual marriage, no relative by blood, even to the fourth degree, can marry her who was betrothed to him? This is no vindication of public propriety, but mere ignorance of it. Why among the people of Israel, which possessed the best laws, given by God himself, was there no such vindication of public propriety? On the contrary, by the very command of God, the nearest relative was compelled to marry her who had been left a widow. Ought the people who are in Christian liberty to be burdened with more rigid laws than the people who were in legal bondage? And to make an end of these figments rather than impediments, I will say that at present it is evident to me that there is no impediment which can rightfully annul a marriage already contracted, except physical unfitness for cohabiting with a wife, ignorance of a marriage previously contracted, or a vow of chastity. Concerning such a vow, however, I am so uncertain even to the present moment, that I do not know at what time it ought to be reckoned valid; as I have said above in speaking of baptism. Learn then, in this one matter of matrimony, into what an unhappy and hopeless state of confusion, hindrance, entanglement, and peril all things that are done in the Church have been brought by the pestilent, unlearned, and impious traditions of men! There is no hope of a remedy, unless we can do away once for all with all the laws of all men, call back the gospel of liberty, and judge and rule all things according to it alone. Amen.

It is necessary also to deal with the question of physical incapacity. But be it premised that I desire what I have said about impediments to be understood of marriages already contracted, which ought not to be annulled for any such causes. But with regard to the contracting of matrimony I may briefly repeat what I have said before, that if there be any urgency of youthful love, or any other necessity, on account of which the Pope grants a dispensation, then any brother can also grant a dispensation to his brother, or himself to himself, and thus snatch his wife, in whatever way he can, out of the hands of tyrannical laws. Why is my liberty to be done away with by another man's superstition and ignorance? Or if the Pope gives dispensation for money, why may not I give a dispensation to my brother or to myself for the advantage of my own salvation? Does the Pope establish laws? Let him establish them for himself, but let my liberty be untouched.

The question of divorce is also discussed, whether it be lawful. I, for my part, detest divorce, and even prefer bigamy to it; but whether it be lawful I dare not define. Christ himself, the chief of shepherds, says: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the



cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.” (Matt. v. 32.) Christ therefore permits divorce only in the case of fornication. Hence the Pope must necessarily be wrong, as often as he permits divorce for other reasons, nor ought any man forthwith to consider himself safe, because he has obtained a dispensation by pontifical audacity rather than power. I am more surprised, however, that they compel a man who has been separated from his wife by divorce to remain single, and do not allow him to marry another. For if Christ permits divorce for the cause of fornication, and does not compel any man to remain single, and if Paul bids us rather to marry than to burn, this seems plainly to allow of a man’s marrying another in the place of her whom he has put away. I wish that this subject were fully discussed and made clear, that provision might be made for the numberless perils of those who at the present day are compelled to remain single without any fault of their own; that is, whose wives or husbands have fled and deserted their partner, not to return for ten years, or perhaps never. I am distressed and grieved by these cases, which are of daily occurrence, whether this happens by the special malice of Satan, or from our neglect of the word of God.

I cannot by myself establish any rule contrary to the opinion of all; but for my own part, I should exceedingly wish at least to see applied to this subject the words: “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Cor. vii. 15). Here the Apostle permits that the unbelieving one who departs should be let go, and leaves it free to the believer to take another. Why should not the same rule hold good, if a believer, that is, a nominal believer, but in reality just as much an unbeliever, deserts husband or wife, especially if with the intention of never returning? I cannot discover any distinction between the two cases. In my belief, however, if in the Apostle’s time the unbeliever who had departed had returned, or had become a believer, or had promised to live with the believing wife, he would not have been received, but would himself have been authorised to marry another woman. Still, I give no definite opinion on these questions, though I greatly wish that a definite rule were laid down, for there is nothing which more harasses me and many others. I would not have any rule on this point laid down by the sole authority of the Pope or the bishops; but if any two learned and good men agreed together in the name of Christ, and pronounced a decision in the spirit of Christ, I should prefer their judgment even to that of councils, such as are assembled nowadays, which are celebrated simply for their number and authority, independently of learning and holiness. I therefore suspend my utterances on this subject, until I can confer with some better judge.

## **OF ORDERS.**

Of this sacrament the Church of Christ knows nothing; it was invented by the church of the Pope. It not only has no promise of grace, anywhere declared, but not a word is said about it in the whole of the New Testament. Now it is ridiculous to set up as a sacrament of God that which can nowhere be proved to have been instituted by God. Not that I consider that a rite practised for so many ages is to be condemned; but I would not have human inventions established in sacred things, nor should it be allowed to bring in anything as divinely ordained, which has not been divinely ordained; lest we should be

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

objects of ridicule to our adversaries. We must endeavour that whatever we put forward as an article of the faith should be certain and uncorrupt and established by clear proofs from Scripture; and this we cannot show even in the slightest degree in the case of the present sacrament.

The Church has no power to establish new divine promises of grace, as some senselessly assert, who say that, since the Church is governed by the Holy Spirit, whatever she ordains has no less authority than that which is ordained of God. The Church is born of the word of promise through faith, and is nourished and preserved by the same word; that is, she herself is established by the promises of God, not the promise of God by her. The word of God is incomparably above the Church, and her part is not to establish, ordain, or make anything in it, but only to be established, ordained, and made, as a creature. What man begets his own parent? Who establishes the authority by which he himself exists?

This power the Church certainly has—that she can distinguish the word of God from the words of men. So Augustine confesses that his motive for believing the gospel was the authority of the Church, which declared it to be the gospel. Not that the Church is therefore above the gospel; for, if so, she would also be above God, in whom we believe, since she declares Him to be God; but, as Augustine says elsewhere, the soul is so taken possession of by the truth, that thereby it can judge of all things with the utmost certainty, and yet cannot judge the truth itself, but is compelled by an infallible certainty to say that this is the truth. For example, the mind pronounces with infallible certainty that three and seven are ten, and yet can give no reason why this is true, while it cannot deny that it is true. In fact the mind itself is taken possession of, and, having truth as its judge, is judged rather than judges. Even such a perception is there in the Church, by the illumination of the Spirit, in judging and approving of doctrines; a perception which she cannot demonstrate, but which she holds as most sure. Just as among philosophers no one judges of those conceptions which are common to all, but everyone is judged by them, so is it among us with regard to that spiritual perception which judgeth all things, yet is judged of no man, as the Apostle says.

Let us take it then for certain that the Church cannot promise grace, to do which is the part of God alone, and therefore cannot institute a sacrament. And even, if she had the most complete power to do so, it would not forthwith follow, that orders are a sacrament. For who knows what is that Church which has the Spirit, when only a few bishops and learned men are usually concerned in setting up these laws and institutions? It is possible that these men may not be of the Church, and may all be in error; as councils have very often been in error, especially that of Constance, which has erred the most impiously of all. That only is a proved article of the faith which has been approved by the universal Church, and not by that of Rome alone. I grant therefore that orders may be a sort of church rite, like many others which have been introduced by the Fathers of the Church, such as the consecration of vessels, buildings, vestments, water, salt, candles, herbs, wine, and the like. In all these no one asserts that there is any sacrament, nor is there any promise in them. Thus the anointing of a man's hands, the shaving of his head, and other ceremonies of the kind, do not constitute a sacrament, since nothing is promised by these

things, but they are merely employed to prepare men for certain offices, as in the case of vessels or instruments.

But it will be asked: What do you say to Dionysius, who reckons up six sacraments, among which he places Orders, in his Hierarchy of the Church? My answer is: I know that he is the only one of the ancient authorities who is considered as holding seven sacraments, although, by the omission of matrimony, he has only given six. We read nothing at all in the rest of the Fathers about these sacraments, nor did they reckon them under the title of sacrament, when they spoke of these things, for the invention of such sacraments is a modern one. Then too—if I may be rash enough to say so—it is altogether unsatisfactory that so much importance should be attributed to this Dionysius, whoever he was, for there is almost nothing of solid learning in him. By what authority or reason, I ask, does he prove his inventions concerning angels in his Celestial Hierarchy, a book on the study of which curious and superstitious minds have spent so much labour? Are they not all fancies of his own, and very much like dreams, if we read them and judge them freely? In his mystic theology indeed, which is so much cried up by certain very ignorant theologians, he is even very mischievous, and follows Plato rather than Christ, so that I would not have any believing mind bestow even the slightest labour on the study of these books. You will be so far from learning Christ in them that, even if you know Him, you may lose Him. I speak from experience. Let us rather hear Paul, and learn Jesus Christ and Him crucified. For this is the way, the truth, and the life; this is the ladder by which we come to the Father, as it is written: “No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”

So in his Hierarchy of the Church, what does he do but describe certain ecclesiastical rites, amusing himself with his own allegories, which he does not prove, just as has been done in our time by the writer of the book called the Rationale of Divine things? This pursuit of allegories is only fit for men of idle minds. Could I have any difficulty in amusing myself with allegories about any created thing whatever? Did not Bonaventura apply the liberal arts allegorically to theology? It would give me no trouble to write a better Hierarchy than that of Dionysius, as he knew nothing of popes, cardinals, and archbishops, and made the bishops the highest order. Who, indeed, is there of such slender wits that he cannot venture upon allegory? I would not have a theologian bestow any attention upon allegories, until he is perfectly acquainted with the legitimate and simple meaning of Scripture; otherwise, as it happened to Origen, his theological speculations will not be without danger.

We must not then immediately make a sacrament of anything which Dionysius describes; otherwise why not make a sacrament of the procession which he describes in the same passage, and which continues in use even to the present day? Nay, there will be as many sacraments as there are rites and ceremonies which have grown up in the Church. Resting, however, on this very weak foundation, they have invented and attributed to this sacrament of theirs certain indelible characters, supposed to be impressed on those who receive orders. Whence, I ask, such fancies? By what authority, by what reasoning are they established? Not that we object to their being free to invent, learn, or assert whatever they please; but we also assert our own liberty, and say that they must not arrogate to

themselves the right of making articles of the faith out of their own fancies, as they have hitherto had the presumption to do. It is enough that, for the sake of concord, we submit to their rights and inventions, but we will not be compelled to receive them as necessary to salvation, when they are not necessary. Let them lay aside their tyrannical requirements, and we will show a ready compliance with their likings, that so we may live together in mutual peace. For it is a disgraceful, unjust, and slavish thing for a Christian man, who is free, to be subjected to any but heavenly and divine traditions.

After this they bring in their very strongest argument, namely, that Christ said at the last supper: “Do this in remembrance of me.” “Behold!” they say, “Christ ordained them as priests.” Hence, among other things, they have also asserted that it is to priests alone that both kinds should be administered. In fact they have extracted out of this text whatever they would; like men who claim the right to assert at their own free choice whatsoever they please out of any words of Christ, wherever spoken. But is this to interpret the words of God? Let us reply to them that in these words Christ gives no promise, but only a command that this should be done in remembrance of Him. Why do they not conclude that priests were ordained in that passage also where Christ, in laying upon them the ministry of the word and of baptism, said: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”? It is the peculiar office of priests to preach and to baptize. Again, since at the present day it is the very first business of a priest, and, as they say, an indispensable one, to read the canonical Hours; why have they not taken their idea of the sacrament of orders from those words in which Christ commanded His disciples—as he did in many other places, but especially in the garden of Gethsemane—to pray that they might not enter into temptation? Unless indeed they evade the difficulty by saying that it is not commanded to pray, for it suffices to read the canonical Hours; so that this cannot be proved to be a priestly work from any part of Scripture, and that consequently this praying priesthood is not of God; as indeed it is not.

Which of the ancient Fathers has asserted that by these words priests were ordained? Whence then this new interpretation? It is because it has been sought by this device to set up a source of implacable discord, by which clergy and laity might be placed farther asunder than heaven and earth, to the incredible injury of baptismal grace and confusion of evangelical communion. Hence has originated that detestable tyranny of the clergy over the laity, in which, trusting to the corporal unction by which their hands are consecrated, to their tonsure, and to their vestments, they not only set themselves above the body of lay Christians, who have been anointed with the Holy Spirit, but almost look upon them as dogs, unworthy to be numbered in the Church along with themselves. Hence it is that they dare to command, exact, threaten, drive, and oppress, at their will. In fine, the sacrament of orders has been and is a most admirable engine for the establishment of all those monstrous evils which have hitherto been wrought, and are yet being wrought, in the Church. In this way Christian brotherhood has perished; in this way shepherds have been turned into wolves, servants into tyrants, and ecclesiastics into more than earthly beings.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

How if they were compelled to admit that we all, so many as have been baptized, are equally priests? We are so in fact, and it is only a ministry which has been entrusted to them, and that with our consent. They would then know that they have no right to exercise command over us, except so far as we voluntarily allow of it. Thus it is said: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” (1 Pet. ii. 9.) Thus all we who are Christians are priests; those whom we call priests are ministers chosen from among us to do all things in our name; and the priesthood is nothing else than a ministry. Thus Paul says: “Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (1 Cor. iv. 1.)

From this it follows that he who does not preach the word, being called to this very office by the Church, is in no way a priest, and that the sacrament of orders can be nothing else than a ceremony for choosing preachers in the Church. This is the description given of a priest: “The priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” (Malachi ii. 7.) Be sure then that he who is not a messenger of the Lord of hosts, or who is called to anything else than a messengership—if I may so speak—is certainly not a priest; as it is written: “Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me.” (Hosea iv. 6.) They are called pastors because it is their duty to give the people pasture, that is, to teach them. Therefore those who are ordained only for the purpose of reading the canonical Hours and offering up masses are popish priests indeed, but not Christian priests, since they not only do not preach but are not even called to be preachers; nay, it is the very thing intended, that a priesthood of this kind shall stand on a different footing from the office of preacher. Thus they are priests of Hours and missals, that is, a kind of living images, having the name of priests, but very far from being really so; such priests as those whom Jeroboam ordained in Beth-aven, taken from the lowest dregs of the people, and not from the family of Levi.

See then how far the glory of the Church has departed. The whole world is full of priests, bishops, cardinals, and clergy; of whom however, (so far as concerns their official duty) not one preaches—unless he be called afresh to this by another calling besides his sacramental orders—but thinks that he amply fulfils the purposes of that sacrament if he murmurs over, in a vain repetition, the prayers which he has to read, and celebrates masses. Even then, he never prays these very Hours, or, if he does pray, he prays for himself; while, as the very height of perversity, he offers up his masses as a sacrifice, though the mass is really the use of the sacrament. Thus it is clear that those orders by which, as a sacrament, men of this kind are ordained to be clergy, are in truth a mere and entire figment, invented by men who understand nothing of church affairs, of the priesthood, of the ministry of the word, or of the sacraments. Such as is the sacrament, such are the priests it makes. To these errors and blindnesses has been added a greater degree of bondage, in that, in order to separate themselves the more widely from all other Christians, as if these were profane, they have burdened themselves with a most hypocritical celibacy.

It was not enough for their hypocrisy and for the working of this error to prohibit bigamy, that is, the having two wives at the same time, as was done under the law—for we know

that that is the meaning of bigamy—but they have interpreted it to be bigamy, if a man marries two virgins in succession, or a widow once. Nay, the most sanctified sanctity of this most sacrosanct sacrament goes so far, that a man cannot even become a priest if he have married a virgin, as long as she is alive as his wife. And, in order to reach the very highest summit of sanctity, a man is kept out of the priesthood, if he have married one who was not a pure virgin, though it were in ignorance and merely by an unfortunate chance. But he may have polluted six hundred harlots, or corrupted any number of matrons or virgins, or even kept many Ganymedes, and it will be no impediment to his becoming a bishop or cardinal, or even Pope. Then the saying of the Apostle: “the husband of one wife,” must be interpreted to mean: “the head of one church;” unless that magnificent dispenser the Pope, bribed with money or led by favour—that is to say, moved by pious charity, and urged by anxiety for the welfare of the churches—chooses to unite to one man three, twenty, or a hundred wives, that is, churches.

O pontiffs, worthy of this venerable sacrament of orders! O princes not of the Catholic churches, but of the synagogues of Satan, yea, of very darkness! We may well cry out with Isaiah: “Ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem” (Isaiah xxviii. 14); and with Amos: “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!” (Amos vi. 1.) O what disgrace to the Church of God from these monstrosities of sacerdotalism! Where are there any bishops or priests who know the gospel, not to say preach it? Why then do they boast of their priesthood? why do they wish to be thought holier and better and more powerful than other Christians, whom they call the laity? What unlearned person is not competent to read the Hours? Monks, hermits, and private persons, although laymen, may use the prayers of the Hours. The duty of a priest is to preach, and unless he does so, he is just as much a priest as the picture of a man is a man. Does the ordination of such babbling priests, the consecration of churches and bells, or the confirmation of children, constitute a bishop? Could not any deacon or layman do these things? It is the ministry of the word that makes a priest or a bishop.

Fly then, I counsel you; fly, young men, if ye wish to live in safety; and do not seek admission to these holy rites, unless ye are either willing to preach the gospel, or are able to believe that ye are not made any better than the laity by this sacrament of orders. To read the Hours is nothing. To offer the mass is to receive the sacrament. What then remains in you, which is not to be found in any layman? Your tonsure and your vestments? Wretched priesthood, which consists in tonsure and vestments! Is it the oil poured on your fingers? Every Christian is anointed and sanctified in body and soul with the oil of the Holy Spirit, and formerly was allowed to handle the sacrament no less than the priests now do; although our superstition now imputes it as a great crime to the laity, if they touch even the bare cup, or the corporal; and not even a holy nun is allowed to wash the altar cloths and sacred napkins. When I see how far the sacrosanct sanctity of these orders has already gone, I expect that the time will come when the laity will not even be allowed to touch the altar, except when they offer money. I almost burst with anger when I think of the impious tyrannies of these reckless men, who mock and ruin the liberty and glory of the religion of Christ by such frivolous and puerile triflings.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

Let every man then who has learnt that he is a Christian recognise what he is, and be certain that we are all equally priests; that is, that we have the same power in the word, and in any sacrament whatever; although it is not lawful for any one to use this power, except with the consent of the community, or at the call of a superior. For that which belongs to all in common no individual can arrogate to himself, until he be called. And therefore the sacrament of orders, if it is anything, is nothing but a certain rite by which men are called to minister in the Church. Furthermore, the priesthood is properly nothing else than the ministry of the word—I mean the word of the gospel, not of the law. The diaconate is a ministry, not for reading the gospel or the epistle, as the practice is nowadays, but for distributing the wealth of the Church among the poor, that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal things, and may give themselves more freely to prayer and to the word. It was for this purpose, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that deacons were appointed. Thus he who does not know the gospel, or does not preach it, is not only to priest or bishop, but a kind of pest to the Church, who, under the false title of priest or bishop, as it were in sheep's clothing, hinders the gospel, and acts the part of the wolf in the Church.

Wherefore those priests and bishops with whom the Church is crowded at the present day, unless they work out their salvation on another plan—that is, unless they acknowledge themselves to be neither priests nor bishops, and repent of bearing the name of an office the work of which they either do not know, or cannot fulfil, and thus deplore with prayers and tears the miserable fate of their hypocrisy—are verily the people of eternal perdition, concerning whom the saying will be fulfilled: “My people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.” (Isaiah v. 13, 14.) O word of dread for our age, in which Christians are swallowed up in such an abyss of evil!

As far then as we are taught from the Scriptures, since what we call the priesthood is a ministry, I do not see at all for what reason a man who has once been made priest cannot become a layman again, since he differs in no wise from a layman, except by his ministerial office. But it is so far from impossible for a man to be set aside from the ministry, that even now this punishment is constantly inflicted on offending priests, who are either suspended for a time, or deprived for ever of their office. For that fiction of an indelible character has long ago become an object of derision. I grant that the Pope may impress this character, though Christ knows nothing of it, and for this very reason the priest thus consecrated is the lifelong servant and bondsman, not of Christ, but of the Pope, as it is at this day. But, unless I deceive myself, if at some future time this sacrament and figment fall to the ground, the Papacy itself will scarcely hold its ground, and we shall recover that joyful liberty in which we shall understand that we are all equal in every right, and shall shake off the yoke of tyranny and know that he who is a Christian has Christ, and he who has Christ has all things that are Christ's, and can do all things—on which I will write more fully and more vigorously when I find that what I have here said displeases my friends the papists.

## **ON THE SACRAMENT OF EXTREME UNCTION.**

To this rite of anointing the sick our theologians have made two additions well worthy of themselves. One is, that they call it a sacrament; the other, that they make it extreme, so that it cannot be administered except to those who are in extreme peril of life. Perhaps—as they are keen dialecticians—they have so made it in relation to the first unction of baptism, and the two following ones of confirmation and orders. They have this, it is true, to throw in my teeth, that, on the authority of the Apostle James, there are in this case a promise and a sign, which two things, I have hitherto said, constitute a sacrament. He says: “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” (James v. 14, 15.) Here, they say, is the promise of remission of sins, and the sign of the oil.

I, however, say that if folly has ever been uttered, it has been uttered on this subject. I pass over the fact that many assert, and with great probability, that this epistle was not written by the Apostle James, and is not worthy of the apostolic spirit; although, whosoever it is, it has obtained authority by usage. Still, even if it were written by the Apostle James, I should say that it was not lawful for an apostle to institute a sacrament by his own authority; that is, to give a divine promise with a sign annexed to it. To do this belonged to Christ alone. Thus Paul says that he had received the sacrament of the Eucharist from the Lord; and that he was sent, not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Nowhere, however, in the gospel do we read of this sacrament of extreme unction. But let us pass this over, and let us look to the words themselves of the Apostle, or of whoever was the author of this Epistle, and we shall at once see how those men have failed to observe their true meaning, who have thus increased the number of sacraments.

In the first place—if they think the saying of the Apostle true and worthy to be followed, by what authority do they change and resist it? Why do they make an extreme and special unction of that which the Apostle meant to be general? The Apostle did not mean it to be extreme, and to be administered only to those about to die. He says expressly: “Is any sick among you?” He does not say: “Is any dying?” Nor do I care what Dionysius’s Ecclesiastical Hierarchy may teach about this; the words of the Apostle are clear, on which he and they alike rest, though they do not follow them. Thus it is evident that, by no authority, but at their own discretion, they have made, out of the ill-understood words of the Apostle, a sacrament and an extreme unction; thus wronging all the other sick, whom they have deprived on their own authority of that benefit of anointing which the Apostle appointed for them.

But it is even a finer argument, that the promise of the Apostle expressly says: “The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.” The Apostle commands the use of anointing and prayer for the very purpose that the sick man may be healed and raised up, that is, may not die, and that the unction may not be extreme. This is proved by the prayers which are used even at this day during the ceremony of anointing, and in which we ask that the sick man may be restored. They say, on the



contrary, that unction should not be administered except to those on the point of departing; that is, that they may not be healed and raised up. If the matter were not so serious, who could refrain from laughing at such fine, apt, and sound comments on the words of the Apostle? Do we not manifestly detect here that sophistical folly which, in many other cases as well as in this, affirms what Scripture denies, and denies what it affirms? Shall we not render thanks to these distinguished teachers of ours? I have said rightly then, that nowhere have they displayed wilder folly than in this instance.

Further—if this unction is a sacrament, it must be beyond doubt an effectual sign (as they say) of that which it seals and promises. Now it promises health and restoration to the sick, as the words plainly show: “The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.” Who does not see, however, that this promise is seldom, or rather never fulfilled? Scarcely one among a thousand is restored; and even this no one believes to be effected by the sacrament, but by the help of nature or of medicine; while to the sacrament they attribute a contrary effect. What shall we say then? Either the Apostle is deceiving us in this promise, or this unction is not a sacrament; for a sacramental promise is sure, while this in most cases disappoints us. Nay—to recognise another example of the prudence and carefulness of these theologians—they will have it to be extreme unction in order that that promise may not stand; that is, that the sacrament may not be a sacrament. If the unction is extreme, it does not heal, but yields to the sickness; while if it heals, it cannot be extreme. Thus, according to the interpretation of these teachers, James must be understood to have contradicted himself, and to have instituted a sacrament, on purpose not to institute a sacrament; for they will have it to be extreme unction, in order that it may not be true that the sick are healed by it, which is what the Apostle ordained. If this is not madness, what, I ask, is madness?

The words of the Apostle: “Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim. i. 7.), apply to these men; with so little judgment do they read and draw conclusions. With the same stupidity they have inferred the doctrine of auricular confession from the words of the Apostle James: “Confess your faults one to another.” They do not even observe the command of the Apostle, that the elders of the Church should be called for, and that they should pray over the sick. Scarcely one priest is sent now, though the Apostle would have many to be present, not for the purpose of anointing, but for that of prayer; as he says: “The prayer of faith shall save the sick.” Moreover, I am not sure that he means priests to be understood in this case, since he says elders, that is, seniors in age. Now it does not follow that an elder must be a priest or a minister, and we may suspect that the Apostle intended that the sick should be visited by the men of greater age and weightier character in the Church, who should do this as a work of mercy, and heal the sick by the prayer of faith. At the same time it cannot be denied, that of old the churches were ruled by the older men, chosen for this purpose on account of their age and long experience of life, without the ordinations and consecrations now used.

I am therefore of opinion that this is the same anointing as that used by the Apostles, of whom it is written: “They anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.” (Mark vi. 13.) It was a rite of the primitive Church, long since obsolete, by which they

did miracles for the sick; just as Christ says of them that believe: “They shall take up serpents; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” (Mark xvi. 18.) It is astonishing that they have not made sacraments out of these words also; since they have a like virtue and promise with those words of James. This pretended extreme unction, then, is not a sacrament, but a counsel of the Apostle James, taken, as I have said, from the Gospel of Mark; and one which any one who will may follow. I do not think that it was applied to all sick persons, for the Church glories in her infirmities, and thinks death a gain; but only to those who bore their sickness impatiently and with little faith, and whom the Lord therefore left, that on them the miraculous power and the efficacy of faith might be conspicuously shown.

James, indeed, has carefully and intentionally provided against this very mistake, in that he connects the promise of healing and of remission of sins, not with the anointing, but with the prayer of faith; for he says: “The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” (James v. 15.) Now a sacrament does not require prayer or faith on the part of him who administers it, for even a wicked man may baptize and consecrate the elements without prayer; but it rests solely on the promise and institution of God, and requires faith on the part of him who receives it. But where is the prayer of faith in our employment of extreme unction at the present day? Who prays over the sick man with such faith as not to doubt of his restoration? Such is the prayer of faith which James here describes; that prayer of which he had said at the beginning of the epistle: “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering;” and of which Christ says: “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” (Mark xi. 24.)

There is no doubt at all that, if even at the present day such prayer were made over the sick—that is, by grave and holy elders, and with full faith—as many as we would might be healed. For what cannot faith do? We, however, leave out of sight that faith which apostolic authority requires in the very first place; and moreover by elders, that is, men superior to the rest in age and in faith, we understand the common herd of priests. Furthermore, out of a daily or free anointing we make an extreme unction; and lastly, we not only do not ask and obtain that result of healing promised by the Apostle, but we empty the promise of its meaning by an opposite result. Nevertheless we boast that this sacrament, or rather figment, of ours, is founded on and proved by the teaching of the Apostle, from which it is as widely separated as pole from pole. Oh, what theologians!

Therefore, without condemning this our sacrament of extreme unction, I steadily deny that it is that which is enjoined by the Apostle James, of which neither the form, nor the practice, nor the efficacy, nor the purpose, agrees with ours. We will reckon it, however, among those sacraments which are of our own appointing, such as the consecration and sprinkling of salt and water. We cannot deny that, as the Apostle Paul teaches us, every creature is sanctified by the word of God and prayer; and so we do not deny that remission and peace are bestowed through extreme unction; not because it is a sacrament divinely instituted, but because he who receives it believes that he obtains these benefits. For the faith of the receiver does not err, however much the minister may err. For if he who baptizes or absolves in jest—that is, does not absolve at all, as far as the minister’s

part is concerned—yet does really absolve or baptize, if there be faith on the part of the absolved or baptized person, how much more does he who administers extreme unction bestow peace; even though in reality he bestows no peace, if we look to his ministry, since there is no sacrament. The faith of the person anointed receives that blessing which he who anointed him either could not, or did not intend, to give. It is enough that the person anointed hears and believes the word; for whatever we believe that we shall receive, that we do really receive, whatever the minister may do or not do, whether he play a part, or be in jest. For the saying of Christ holds good: “All things are possible to him that believeth;” and again: “As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.” Our sophists, however, make no mention of this faith in treating of the sacraments, but give their whole minds to frivolous discussions on the virtues of the sacraments themselves; ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

It has been of advantage, however, that this unction has been made extreme, for, thanks to this, it has been of all sacraments the least harassed and enslaved by tyranny and thirst for gain; and this one mercy has been left to the dying, that they are free to be anointed, even if they have not confessed or communicated. Whereas if it had continued to be of daily employment, especially if it had also healed the sick, even if it had not taken away sins, of how many worlds would not the pontiffs by this time have been masters—they who, on the strength of the one sacrament of penance, and by the power of the keys, and through the sacrament of orders, have become such mighty emperors and princes? But now it is a fortunate thing that, as they despise the prayer of faith, so they heal no sick, and, out of an old rite, have formed for themselves a new sacrament.

Let it suffice to have said thus much concerning these four sacraments. I know how much it will displease those who think that we are to enquire about the number and use of the sacraments, not from the holy Scriptures, but from the See of Rome; as if the See of Rome had given us those sacraments, and had not rather received them from the schools of the Universities; to which, without controversy, it owes all that it has. The tyranny of the popes would never have stood so high if it had not received so much help from the Universities; for among all the principal sees, there is scarcely any other which has had so few learned bishops. It is by force, fraud, and superstition alone that it has prevailed over the rest; and those who occupied that see a thousand years ago are so widely diverse from those who have grown into power in the interim, that we are compelled to say that either the one or the other were not pontiffs of Rome.

There are besides some other things, which it may seem that we might reckon among sacraments—all those things, namely, to which a divine promise has been made, such as prayer, the word, the cross. For Christ has promised in many places to hear those that pray; especially in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, where he invites us to prayer by many parables. Of the word he says: “Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.” (Luke xi. 28.) And who can reckon up how often he promises succour and glory to those who are in tribulation, suffering, and humiliation? Nay, who can count up all the promises of God? For it is the whole object of all Scripture to lead us to faith; on the one side urging us with commandments and threatenings, on the other side inviting us by promises and consolations. Indeed all Scripture consists of either commandments

or promises. Its commandments humble the proud by their requirements; its promises lift up the humble by their remissions of sin.

It has seemed best, however, to consider as sacraments, properly so called, those promises which have signs annexed to them. The rest, as they are not attached to signs, are simple promises. It follows that, if we speak with perfect accuracy, there are only two sacraments in the Church of God, Baptism and the Bread; since it is in these alone that we see both a sign divinely instituted and a promise of remission of sins. The sacrament of penance, which I have reckoned along with these two, is without any visible and divinely appointed sign; and is nothing else, as I have said, than a way and means of return to baptism. Not even the schoolmen can say that penitence agrees with their definition; since they themselves ascribe to every sacrament a visible sign, which enables the senses to apprehend the form of that effect which the sacrament works invisibly. Now penitence or absolution has no such sign; and therefore they will be compelled by their own definition either to say that penitence is not one of the sacraments, and thus to diminish their number, or else to bring forward another definition of a sacrament.

Baptism, however, which we have assigned to the whole of life, will properly suffice for all the sacraments which we are to use in life; while the bread is truly the sacrament of the dying and departing, since in it we commemorate the departure of Christ from this world, that we may imitate Him. Let us then so distribute these two sacraments that baptism may be allotted to the beginning and to the whole course of life, and the bread to its end and to death; and let the Christian, while in this vile body, exercise himself in both, until, being fully baptized and strengthened, he shall pass out of this world, as one born into a new and eternal life, and destined to eat with Christ in the kingdom of his Father, as he promised at the Last Supper, saying: "I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come." (Luke xxii. 18.) Thus it is evident that Christ instituted the sacrament of the bread that we might receive the life which is to come; and then, when the purpose of each sacrament shall have been fulfilled, both baptism and the bread will cease.

I shall here make an end of this essay, which I readily and joyfully offer to all pious persons, who long to understand Scripture in its sincere meaning, and to learn the genuine use of the sacraments. It is a gift of no slight importance to "know the things that are freely given to us of God," and to know in what manner we ought to use those gifts. For if we are instructed in this judgment of the Spirit, we shall not deceive ourselves by leaning on those things which are opposed to it. Whereas our theologians have not only nowhere given us the knowledge of these two things, but have even darkened them, as if of set purpose, I, if I have not given that knowledge, have at least succeeded in not darkening it, and have given others an inducement to think out something better. It has at least been my endeavour to explain the meaning of both sacraments, but we cannot all do all things. On those impious men, however, who in their obstinate tyranny press on us their own teachings as if they were God's, I thrust these things freely and confidently, caring not at all for their ignorance and violence. And yet even to them I will wish sounder sense, and will not despise their efforts, but will only distinguish them from those which are legitimate and really Christian.

*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church – Martin Luther*

I hear a report that fresh bulls and papal curses are being prepared against me, by which I am to be urged to recant, or else be declared a heretic. If this is true, I wish this little book to be a part of my future recantation, that they may not complain that their tyranny has puffed itself up in vain. The remaining part I shall shortly publish, Christ being my helper, and that of such a sort as the See of Rome has never yet seen or heard, thus abundantly testifying my obedience in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hostis Herodes impie,

Christum venire quid times?

Non arripit mortalia

Qui regna dat cœlestia.

---