

DISCOURSE

CONCERNING

Auricular Confession.

As it is prescribed by the

COUNCIL

O F

TRENT,

And practised in the

CHURCH of ROME.

With a Post-script on occasion of a Book
lately printed in FRANCE, called

Historia Confessionis Auricularis.

DUBLIN,

Re-printed by Andrew Crook and Samuel Helsham, for Joseph Howes,
Samuel Helsham and Eliphaz Dobson Booksellers. 1686.

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Re-printed by Thomas Green and Samuel Johnson, for Robert Hume,
Stamard-Kings and Bishop's Book-binders. 1736.

Auricular Confession.

THE Zealots of the Church of *Rome* are wont to glory of the singular advantages, in the Communion of that Church, especially in respect of the greater means and helps of Spiritual Comfort, which they pretend are to be had there, above and beyond what are to be found amongst other Societies of Christians. Which one thing, if it could be as substantially made out, as it is confidently asserted, could not fail to sway very much with all wise men, and would undoubtedly prevail with all devout persons, (who were made acquainted with the secret) to go over to them. But if contrariwise it appear upon search, that their pretensions of this kind are false and groundless, and that the methods of administering Consolation, which are peculiar to that Church, are as well unsafe and deceitful, as singular and unnecessary: Then the same Prudence and Sincerity will oblige a man to suspect that Communion, instead of becoming a profelyte to it, and to look upon the aforesaid boastings as the effect either of designed Imposture, or at the least of Ignorance and Delusion.

Amongst other things, that Church highly values it self upon, the Sacrament of Penance (as they call it) and as deeply blames and condemns the Church of *England*, and other Reformed Churches, for their defect in, and neglect of so important and comfortable an Office. And under that specious pretext, her Emissaries (who are wont according to the phrase of the Apostle, *to creep into Houses, and lead captive silly Women, &c.*) insinuate themselves into such of the people as have more Zeal than Knowledge, and now and then wheadle some of them over into their Society. To that purpose, they will not only harangue them with fine Stories of the Ease and Benefit of it, as of an ancient and useful Rite, but will also preach to them the necessity of it, as of Divine Institution, and that it is as important (in its kind) as Baptism and the Lords Supper. For that Confession to a Priest, and his Absolution thereupon obtained, is the only means appointed by God for the procuring of Pardon of all mortal Sins committed after Baptism.

Council. Trid.
Sess. 14. c. 2.

Vid. Becan.
Tract. de Sa-
cramentis in
specie.

As for original Sin, or whatsoever actual transgressions may have been committed before Baptism, all those they acknowledged to be washed away in that sacred Lavef. And for Sins of Infirmary, or Venial Sins, these may be done away by several easie methods, by Contrition alone (say some,) nay, by Attrition alone (say others,) by habitual Grace, says a third, &c. But for mortal sins committed after a man is admitted into the Church by Baptism, for these there is no other door of Mercy, but the Priests Lips, nor hath God appointed, or will admit of any other way of Reconciliation than this, of Confession to a Priest, and his Absolution.

This Sacrament of Penance therefore is called by them, *Secunda Tabula post naufragium*, the peculiar refuge of a lapsed Christian, the only Sanctuary of a guilty Conscience, the sole means of restoring such a person to Peace of Conscience, the Favour of God, and the Hopes of Heaven. And withal, this method is held to be so sovereign and effectual a Remedy, that it cures *tories, quoties*; and whatever a mans miscarriages have been, and how often soever repeated, if he do but as often resort to it, he shall return as pure and clean as when he first came from the Font.

This ready and easie way, (say they) hath God allowed men, of quitting all scores with himself, in the use of which they may have perfect peace in their Consciences, and may think of the day of Judgment without horror, having their case decided beforehand by Gods Deputy the Priest, and their Pardon ready to produce, and plead at the Tribunal of Christ.

What a mighty defect is it therefore in the Protestant Churches, who wanting this Sacrament, want the principal Ministry of Reconciliation? And who would not joyn himself to the Society of that Church, where this great Case is so abundantly provided for? For if all this be true, he must be extremely fool-hardy, and deserve to perish, who will not be of that Communion, from whence the way to Heaven is so very easie and obvious; no wonder therefore, I say, if not only the loose and vicious are fond of this Communion, where they may sin and confess, and confess and sin again without any great danger; but it would be strange if the more Virtuous and Prudent also, did not out of more caution think it became them to comply with this expedient. For as much as there is no man who understands himself, but must be conscious of having committed sins since his Baptism, and then for fear some of them should prove to be of a mortal nature, it will be his safest course to betake himself to this refuge, and consequently he will easily be drawn to

to that Church, where the only Remedy of his Disease is to be had.

But the best of it is, these things are sooner said than proved, and more easily fanfied by silly people, than believed by those of Discretion. And therefore there may be no culpable Defect in the Reformed Churches, that they trust not to this Remedy in so great a Case. And as for the Church of *England* in particular, though she hath no fondness for Mountebank Medicines, as observing them to be seldom successful; yet she is not wanting in her Care, and Compassion to the Souls under her Guidance, but expresseth as much Tenderness of their Peace and Comfort, as the Church of *Rome* can pretend to. Indeed she hath not set up a Confessors Chair in every Parish, nor much less placed the Priest in the Seat of God Almighty, as thinking it safer, at least in ordinary Cases, to remit men to the written Word of God, and to the publick Ministry thereof, for resolution of Conscience, than to the secret Oracle of a Priest in a corner, and advises them rather to observe what God himself declares of the nature and guilt of Sin, the aggravations or abatements of it, and the terms and conditions of Pardon, than what a Priest pronounces. But however this course doth not please the Church of *Rome*, for Reasons best known to themselves, which, if we may guess at, the main seems to be this, they do not think it fit to let men be their own Carvers, but lead them like Children by the hand; my meaning is, they keep people as much in Ignorance of the holy Scripture as they can, locking that up from them in an unknown Tongue; now if they may not be trusted with those sacred Records, so as to inform themselves of the Terms of the New Covenant, the Conditions of the Pardon of Sin, and Salvation, it is then but reasonable that the Priest should judge for them, and that they await their doom from his Mouth. Yet I do not see why in a Protestant Church, where the whole Religion is in the Mother Tongue, the Old and especially the New Testament constantly, and conscientiously expounded, and to search the Scriptures, and to see whether things be so or no, I see not, I say, why in such a case the Priest may not in great measure be excused the trouble of attending secret Confessions, without danger to the Souls of men.

But besides this, there is a constant use of Confession and Absolution too, in the Church of *England*, in every Days Service: which, though they be both in general terms, as they ought to be in publick Worship, yet every Penitent can both from his own Conscience supply the generality of the Confession by a remorseful reflection upon his own particular Sins, as well as if he did it at the knees of a Priest; and also by an act of Faith can apply the general Sentence of Absolution to his own Soul, with

with as good and comfortable effects, as if it had been specially pronounced by his Confessor.

But this publick Confession doth not please the *Romanists* neither, and they know a Reason for their dislike; namely, because this doth not conciliate so great a Veneration to the Priest-hood, as when all men are brought to kneel to them for Salvation: Neither doth this way make them to pry into the secret Thoughts of Men, as Auricular Confession doth, wherein the Priest is not only made a Judge of mens estate, but a Spy upon their behaviour, and is capable of becoming an Intelligencer to his Superiors of all the Designs, Interests, and even Constitutions of the people.

Moreover the Church of *England* allows of private Confessions also, as particularly in the Visitation of the Sick, (which Office extends also to them that are troubled in Mind or Conscience, as well as to the afflicted in Body) where the Minister is directed to examine particularly the state of the Decumbents Soul, to search and romage his Conscience, to try his Faith, his Repentance, his Charity, nay, to move him to make a special Confession of his Sins, and afterwards to absolve him upon just grounds.

Nay further yet, if (besides the case of Sicknes) any Man shall either out of perplexity of Mind, scrupulosity or remorse of Conscience, or any other devout consideration, think it needful to apply himself to a Priest of the Church of *England* for Advice, Ease, or Relief, he hath Incouragement and Direction so to do in the first Exhortation to the Holy Communion, and may be sure to find those who will tenderly, and faithfully, as well as secretly administer to his necessities. So that I see not what defect or omission can be objected to this Church in all this Affair, or what Temptation any Man can have upon this account to go from us to the Church of *Rome*.

But all this will not satisfie them of the Church of *Rome*, they are neither contented with publick Confession, nor with private, no nor with secret neither, if it be only occasional or voluntary: It is the universality and necessity of it which they insist upon; for it is not with them a matter of Ecclesiastical Discipline, to prevent the Scandal of the Society, to conserve the Reverence of the Church, or to restrain men from sinning, or much less an Office of Expediency and Prudence to be resorted to upon exigencies, or such as may accidentally become necessary upon emergency, as suppose upon the atrocity of fact committed, the scandalousness of some persons former life, which may make him more doubtful of his Pardon, the weakness of his Judgment, the Melancholy of his Temper, or the Anxiety of his Mind, or any such like occasion,

but

but it must be the standing indispenfible Duty of all men, as the condition of the Pardon of the Sins; in a word, it must be a Sacrament of Divine Institution, and of Universal Obligation.

For so the Council of *Trent* determines, *Seff. 4. Canon 1. Si quis dixerit in Ecclesia Catholica poenitentiam non esse vere & proprie Sacramentum pro fidelibus, quoties post Baptismum in peccata labentur, ipse Deo reconciliandis a Domino nostro institutum, Anathema sit; i. e.* Let him be accursed, who shall affirm that Penance is not truly and properly a Sacrament instituted and appointed in the Universal Church, by our Lord Christ himself, for the reconciling those Christians to the Divine Majesty, who have fallen into Sin after their Baptism.

And in the Doctrinal part of that Decree they teach and assert more particularly; First, That our Saviour instituted this Sacrament expressly, *Joh. 20. 22.*

2. That this Sacrament consists of two parts, viz. the Matter and the Form; the Matter of the Sacrament (or *quasi materia*, as they cautiously speak) is the act or acts of the Penitent, namely, Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction; the Form of it is the act of the Priest in these words, *Absolvo te.* *Seff. 14. Cap. 2.*

3. That therefore it is the duty of every Man who hath fallen after Baptism, as aforesaid, to confess his sins at least once a year to a Priest. *Cap. 3.*

4. That this Confession is to be secret; for publick Confession they say is neither commanded nor expedient. *Cap. 5.*

5. That this Confession of Mortal Sin be very exact and particular, together with all circumstances, especially such as *speciem facti mutant*, alter the kind or degree of Sin, and that it extend to the most secret Sins, even of Thought, or against the ninth and tenth Commandment. *Ibid.*

6. That the Penitent thus doing, the Absolution of the Priest hereupon pronounced is not conditional or declarative only, but absolute and judicial. *Ibid.*

Now in opposition to this Doctrine and Decree of theirs, and the Practice of that Church pursuant thereof, as well as in defence of the Doctrine and Practice of the Church of *England* in that particular, I will here endeavour to make good these three things.

1. That our blessed Lord and Saviour hath neither in his Gospel instituted such an Auricular Confession as aforesaid, nor, much less, such a Sacrament of Penance as the Church of *Rome* supposes in the recited Decree.

2. That Auricular Confession hath not been of constant and universal

versal use in the Christian Church, as the *Romanists* pretend, much less looked upon as of Sacramental and necessary Obligation.

3. That Auricular Confession, as it is now used in the Church of *Rome*, is not only unnecessary and burdensome, but in many respects very mischievous to Piety, and the great ends of Christian Religion.

If the first of these appear to be true, then (at the worst) the want of such an Auricular Confession in the reformed Churches, can be but an irregularity, and no essential defect.

If the second of these assertions be made good, then it can be no defect at all in those Churches that use not such a Rite, but a Novelty and Imposition on their parts who so strictly require it.

But if the third be true, it will be the Corruption and great fault of the Church of *Rome* to persevere in the Injunction and Practice of it, and the Excellency and Commendation of those Churches which exclude it.

I begin with the first, That it doth not appear that our Saviour hath instituted such an Auricular Confession, of such a Sacrament of Penance as the Church of *Rome* pretends and practises.

I confess it is a Negative which I here undertake to make good, which is accounted a difficult Province; but the Council of *Trent* hath relieved us in that particular, by founding the Institution expressly upon that one passage of the Gospel, *Joh. 20. 22.* So that we shall not need to examine the whole Body of Scripture to discover what footsteps of Divine Institution may be found here or there, for the Council wholly insists and relies upon that Text of *St. John*; and therefore if that fail them, the whole *Hypothesis* falls to the ground.

Now for the clearing of this, let us lay the words before us; and they are these, *He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

Now here I appeal to any Man that hath Eyes in his Head, or Ears to hear, whether in this Text there be any one word of Auricular Confession, or much less of such a circumstantiated one as they require; And this is so manifest and notorious, that their own ancient Canonists and several of their learned Divines are ashamed of the pretence of Divine Institution founded upon this or any other passage of Scripture; and therefore are content to defend the Practice of the Church of *Rome* in this particular, upon the account of the Authority, and general usage of the Church; which we shall come to examine by and by in its due place.

In the mean time I cannot choose but admire the mighty Faith of a
Romanist,

Romanist, who can believe in spite of his own eyes. It seemed to us an insuperable difficulty heretofore, for a man to persuade himself that in the Sacrament of the Eucharist Bread was transubstantiated into Flesh, because it was against the express testimony of sense, yea, although for that there was the countenance of five figurative (but mistaken) words to support the credulity; but this of the Sacrament of Penance clearly out-does it; for here a man must believe a thing to be, when as there is not so much as one word for the ground of his Faith, or the proof of the thing in question. How many Sacraments may not such men have if they please? What voluminous Creeds may not they swallow and digest? What Mountains may not such a wonderful Faith remove?

But let us hear what they have to say for themselves; perhaps in the first place they will plead the authority of the Council of *Trent*, which hath peremptorily determined the sense of the passage of the Gospel to the purpose aforesaid. Indeed that Council in the third Canon of their fourteenth Session, doth damn all those who deny that a Sacrament of Penance and Auricular Confession is prescribed in that Text of *St. John*, or who apply it to any other purpose. But in so doing, they both usurp a Prerogative which was never pretended to, or practised by any Council before them, and withal they betray a consciousness that the Text itself yielded no sufficient evidence of the thing which they designed to countenance by it; for what Councils (ever till now) brought a Text, and then imposed an Interpretation upon it contrary to the words? And then backt that Interpretation with an *Anathema*? If the Text were plain, or could be made so, why was not that done? And to be sure, if that cannot be done by other means, the curse will not do it; at least to any but very obedient *Roman* Consciences. Besides, if this course be allowed, I see not but a Council may bring in what Religion they please, having first made a Nose of Wax of the Holy Scripture, and then writhed it into what shape they best phansy; for in such a case, if the words of the Gospel do not favour me, I can govern the sense, and if the letter be silent or intractable, I can help that with an Interpretation; and if I have authority or confidence enough to impose that, under the peril of *Anathema*, I am no longer an Interpreter or a Judge, but a Law-giver, and need not trouble my self with *scriptum est*, but may (if I will speak plain) say *decretum est*, and the business is done.

But if neither the Letter of Scripture, nor the Authority of a Council will do in this case, then in the second place they think they have at least some colour of Reason to relieve them; and if they cannot find Auricular Confession in the Text, yet they will by consequence infer

it thence; for they say although indeed it is true it is not here expressly mentioned, yet it is certain that our Saviour in the Text before us instituted a Sacrament of Penance, and therefore Auricular Confession must necessarily be implied, because Absolution cannot be without Confession.

Here the Reader will observe that the point in Question between us is very much altered, for we are now fallen from the consideration of the Divine Institution of Auricular Confession in particular, to that of a Sacrament of Penance in general, *i. e.* from a direct proof to a *subintelligitur*. But we will follow them hither also, and for the clearing of this matter, we will briefly consider these three things.

1. Whether that can properly be said to be of Divine Institution, and necessary to Salvation, which depends on an Inference, and is proved only by an *Innuendo*?

2. Whether it can be reasonable to assert that our Saviour there institutes a Sacrament of Penance, where not only Auricular Confession, but the whole matter of such a Sacrament is left undefined?

3. Whether if our Saviour (had done that which it is plain he hath not, that is) had here instituted and appointed all those things, which by the Church of *Rome* are required as the material parts of Penance, yet this could not have been esteemed a Sacrament?

1. For the first of these, we have no more to do but to consider the force and signification of this word *Institution*. Now that in the common use of men (especially of those which speak distinctly and understandingly) implies a setting up *de novo*, or the appointing that to become a duty which was not knowable, or at least not known to be so before it became so appointed. For this word *Institution* is that which we use to express a positive command by, in opposition to that which is Moral in the strictest sense, and of natural obligation. Now it is very evident that all things of this nature ought to be appointed very plainly and expressly, or else they can carry no obligation with them; for seeing the whole reason of their becoming matter of Law or Duty, lies in the will of the Legislator; if that be not plainly discovered, they cannot be said to be instituted, and so there can be no Obligation to observe them, because where there is no Law, there can be no Transgression; and a Law is no Law in effect, which is not sufficiently promulged. Is it not therefore a very strange thing to tell us of an Institution by implication only, and yet at the same time to tell us that the matter so (pretended to be) instituted, is no less then absolutely necessary to the Salvation of Sinners?

Seff. 14. C. 2.

Seff. 14. C. 3.

2. The second of these will easily be resolved by considering what we observed before from the Council of *Trent*,

viz.

nix. that this Sacrament of Penance consists of Matter and Form; the Form is the Priests Absolution; but the Matter or Materials of this Sacrament are Contrition, Confession to a Priest, and Satisfaction or Performance of the Penance enjoy'd by him; now it is evident that not only Auricular Confession (of which we have spoken hitherto) but also Contrition and Satisfaction are wholly omitted and past over in silence by the Evangelist in this passage of Scripture, from whence they fetch their Sacrament of Penance: And is it not a wonderful strange thing, that our Saviour should be supposed to institute a Sacrament without any Materials of it at all? surely therefore this must be either a very *Spiritual* Sacrament, or none at all.

Let us guess at the probability of this in proportion to either of the other undoubted Sacraments. Suppose our Saviour instead of that accurate form in which he instituted the Eucharist had only said, I would have you my Disciples, and all that shall believe on my Name to keep a Memorial of me when I am gone. Or suppose he said only as he doth, *Joh. 6. 55. My flesh is Meat indeed, and my Blood is drink indeed,* would any one have concluded here, that our Saviour in so saying, had appointed Bread and Wine to be Consecrated, to be received in such a manner, and in a word that he had (without more ado) instituted such a Sacrament as we usually celebrate? No certainly, and therefore we see our Saviour is the most express and particular therein that can be, *for he takes Bread, blesses it, breaks it, gives it to them, saying, Take eat, this is my body, &c. and after Supper he takes the Cup, blesses it, gives it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this, for this is the New Testament in my Blood, &c.* and then adds, *Do this in remembrance of me.* Now who is there that observes this accuracy of our Saviour in the Eucharist, can imagine that he should intend to institute a Sacrament of Penance, and that as necessary to Salvation (in the Opinion of the *Romanists*) as the other, only with this Form of words, *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted, &c.* and without the least mention of Confession, Contrition, or any other material or necessary part or circumstance of it.

3. But in the third and last place, let us suppose that our Saviour had in the Text before us instituted Penance, and had appointed particularly all those things, which they call the material parts of it, (as it is evident he hath not) yet even then, and upon that Supposition, Penance would not have proved to be a Sacrament properly so called.

I confess according to a loose acceptation of the word Sacrament, something may be said for it; for so there are many things have had the name of Sacrament applied to them. *Tertullian* somewhere calls *Elisha's* Ark the Sacrament of Wood; and in his Book against *Marcion*, he styles

the whole Christian Religion a Sacrament. St. *Austin* in several places calls Bread, Fish, the Rock, and the Mystery of Number, Sacraments; for he hath given us a general Rule in his fifth Epistle, viz. That all Signs when they belong to Divine things are called Sacraments: And in consideration hereof it is acknowledged by *Cassander*, that the Number of Sacraments was indefinite in the Church of Rome it self, until the times of *Peter Lombard*. But all this notwithstanding, and properly speaking, this Right of Penance taking it altogether (and even supposing whatsoever the *Romanists* can suppose to belong to it) cannot be reputed a Sacrament, according to the allowed Definitions of a Sacrament delivered by their own Divines. Some of them define a Sa-

a *Hugo de S. Vi. lib. de Sacram.*

b *M. gift. Sent. lib. 4. dist. 1.*

c *Becanus Tract. 2. de Sacram.*

d *Aug. c. Faust. Lib. 19. C. 16.*

a *Sacramentum est corporale elementum foris sensibiliter propositum, ex similitudine representans & ex Institutione significans, & ex Sanctificatione continens invisibilem gratiam.* And the b Master of the Sentences himself

describes it somewhat more briefly, but to the same effect in these words; *Sacramentum est invisibilis gratia visibilis forma, ejusdem gratie imaginem gerens & causa existens;* both which definitions are acknowledged

& applauded by the Jesuit c *Becanus*: And the plain truth is, a Sacrament cannot be better exprest in so few words,

than it is by d *St. Austin* when he calls it *verbum visibile*, a

visible Word or Gospel: For it pleased the Divine Wisdom and Goodness by this Institution of Sacraments to

condescend to our Weakness, and thereby to give us sensible Tokens or

Pledges of what he had promised in his written Word, to the intent

that our Dulness might be relieved, and and our Faith assisted; forasmuch as herein, our Eyes and other Senses as well as our Ears are made

Witnesses of his gracious Intentions. Thus by Baptifmal washing he

gives us a sensible token and representation of our Regeneration, and

the washing away of our Sins by the Blood of Christ; and by the participation of Bread and Wine in the Lords Supper we have a Token and

Symbol of our Union with Christ, our Friendship with God and Com-

munion with each other.

But now it is manifest there is no such thing as this in the Sacrament

of Penance (as even *Bellarmino* himself confesses.) For they do not say

or mean that the Absolution of the Priest is a Token or Emblem of Gods

Forgiveness, but that the Priest actually pardons in Gods stead; by virtue of a Power delegated to him. So that according to them, here must

be a Sacrament, not only without any material parts instituted, but also

without any thing figurative, symbolical or significative, which seems to

be as expressly contrary to their own Doctrine in the aforesaid Definitions as to the Truth it self.

Nay,

Nay, further to evince the difference of this Rite of Penance from all other proper Sacraments; it deserves observation, that whereas in those other acknowledged Sacraments, the Priest in Gods Name delivers to us the Pledges and Symbols of Divine Grace. Here in this of Penance we must bring all the material Parts and Pledges our selves, and present them to God, or to the Priest in his stead: My meaning is, that whereas (for instance) in Baptism the Priest applies to us the Symbol of Water, and in the Eucharist delivers to us the consecrated Elements in token of the Divine Grace, contrary-wise here in Penance we must on our parts bring with us Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction too, in which respect we may be rather said to give Pledges to God, than he to us; which is widely different from the Nature of other Sacraments, and seems no less to be contrary to the Reason and Notion of a Sacrament in general.

The Sum of what we have hitherto discoursed amounts to this; First, That here is no Auricular Confession instituted by our Saviour, *Joh. 20. 22.* as was pretended. Secondly, Nor, any Sacrament of Penance in which it can be included or implied; no nor indeed any Sacrament at all.

I confess, I might have spared all the words I have used in proving the latter: for so long as I have made appear, that private Confession is not Instituted, it was not so very material to consider whether Penance could be a Sacrament or no; but this I added to shew the imperious dictates of that Church, and their extravagancy in imposing the most Sacred Names upon their own Inventions, thereby to give them the greater Veneration with the people.

And thus I would dismiss the first part of my undertaking, but yet the *Romanists* will not forego their pretensions for Auricular Confession; for they will yet urge, that whether or no we will call it a Sacrament which our Saviour institutes in the Text before us, it is however certain here is a Power conferred on the Apostles, and their Successors, of Remitting and Retaining Sins; for by these words, *Whosoever Sins ye remit, they are remitted, &c.* * Our Saviour hath made the Priest a Judge of Mens Consciences and Conditions; wherefore, that he may not proceed blindly and indiscriminately, it is necessary that he know the merits of the Cause, and not only understand the matter of Fact, but all the Circumstances which may aggravate or extenuate it, all which cannot be attained without the Confession of the party; therefore Auricular Confession is as ne-

* *Christus constituit Sacerdotes sui ipsius Vicarios, Sess. 14. Præsides & Judices, ibid. 4. Sacerdos solvit peccata potestate quadam prætoria Bellarm. lib. 1. de Sacram. c. 10. Christus ratam habet sententiam a sacerdote latam, ibid. lib. 3. c. 2.*

cessarily

cessarily implied in the Text, as Absolution or Retention of Sins is expressed in it. So they.

But I crave leave to demand in the first place, Is it certain that upon such a Confession as they require, the Priest (as such) will be able to make a right Judgment of a Mans case that addresses himself to him, especially considering the Intricacy of some Cases, and the Ignorance of some Priests; upon this account are those memorable words of St. *Augustin*, *Conf. lib. 10. c. 3. Quid mihi ergo est cum hominibus ut audiant Confessiones meas, quasi ipsi sanaturi sint omnes. Langores meos, & unde sciunt cum a meipso de meipso audiunt, an verum dicam? Quando quidem nemo fit hominum quid agitur in homine, nisi spiritus hominis qui in ipso est. i. e. To what purpose should I confess my Sins to Men, who cannot heal my wounds? For how shall they (who know nothing of my heart but my own Confession) know whether I say true or no? For no one knows what is in Man, but the Spirit of Man that is in him. O yes, they will say *clave non errante*, that is to say, if he judge right, he judges right, and no more, and this is mighty comfort to a distressed Conscience.*

Secondly, Though we grant our Saviour hath given the Priest Authority to remit and retain Sins, yet how doth it appear that this extends to Secret Sins; Sins in thought only, or, as the Council expresses it, against the Ninth and Tenth Commandments? Of open Sins and publick Scandals the Church hath cognizance, and hath a Right which she may insist upon, or recede from, if she see cause, because such Sins are an injury to the Society, as well as an offence against God, and therefore here the Officers of the Church may dispense her Authority, and remit or retain (as we shall see more by and by;) but in Secret Sins, where only God is injured, and to which he is only privy, what hath the Church to do, unless they be voluntarily discovered to her? Otherwise they are properly reserved Cases to the Tribunal of God.

Thirdly, I would be bold to enquire further, why may not sins, especially such as we last named, be remitted upon Confession to God, without Confession to the Priest also? And I the rather ask this *Scilicet. 14. c. 1.* for these two reasons; First, I observe that this very Council of *Trent* saith, that until the times of our Saviour, and his Institution of this Sacrament, sins were remitted upon Contrition only, and application to the mercies of God, without Auricular Confession. They cannot therefore now say, remission implies this Confession, for that cannot be said to be implied in the nature of a thing, when the thing it self can be had without it.

They will answer that it is sufficient, that it is now made necessary by our Saviour. But I reply, Then that Institution which now makes it necessary

necessary

cessary, must be better proved than yet it hath been, or else men will be very apt to hope they may now under the Gospel obtain Pardon (at least) upon as easy terms as it was to be had before.

My second reason of asking that third Question, is this: I observe that their own Schoolmen acknowledge Sins to be remitted under the Gospel by the Priest without any Confession to Men, ^{Aquinas Summ. part. 2. Q. 8.} particularly in the Administration of Baptism, by which it plainly appears, that Confession is not implied in the nature of Remission, but one may be had without the other, and then why may not a Sinner, after Baptism hope for Pardon upon his contrite and devout application to the Words and Sacraments, without this new Device and Pick-lock of Conscience, Auricular Confession?

But so much for that. I proceed now to the second thing propounded, namely, to inquire historically whether or no Auricular, or such a Secret, and Sacramental Confession, as aforesaid hath been of constant and universal use in the Christian Church, as the Romanists pretend, and as the Council of Trent asserts, *Seff. 14. Chap. 5.*

This Inquiry is not on a matter of Law or Divine Right, as the former was, but of Fact only, yet nevertheless it is of great moment upon a double account: first, because they who pretend to have received the Holy Spirit, and to be in the state of Grace, are bound to confess their sins to God, and to the Church, as a condition of their pardon.

Secondly, because this is the ground which the Old Roman Catholics who went upon, (as I noted before, and they exploded all pretence of Divine Institution in the case, as having more modestly (it seems) than to pretend so high upon no better evidence, or at least they contented themselves to prescribe for it only upon the authority of constant and universal practice; now if we show the falseness of this ground, as well as of the other, then will the Hypothesis of Auricular Confession have no foot to stand upon.

2. Because the credit of what hath been already said under the former head, doth very much depend upon this, and that Discourse will be confirmed or impaired respectively to what shall be evidently made out in this second point. Forasmuch as if on the one side it be made apparent that such a Rite hath been of constant use in the Christian Church, it will afford a great presumption that it took its rise at first from Divine Institution, notwithstanding all we have offered to the contrary. So on the other side, if the Evidence here showed not the pretension, and no sufficient footsteps of constant and universal practice appear, Then will all that which we have hitherto discoursed, be greatly strengthened and confirmed; because it is by no means probable, that if there had been a Divine Law in the case, that such a thing would have been generally neglected by the Christian Church.

Now for the clearing of this, though I am here only upon the defensive, and so bound to no more than to examine the Proofs which the *Romanists* bring for their Pretensions, yet I will deal ingenuously, as seeking not to find Flaws, but to discover the Truth, and therefore give these Instances as so many Reasons for the Negative.

In the first place, I crave leave to premise this: If Auricular Confession were so great a Gospel Mystery, so wonderfully efficacious a method of saving Souls, as to be typified in the Law (as the *Romanists* teach) as well as instituted in the Gospel, and practised by the whole Church, one might seem justly to wonder how it comes to pass that there should be no mention, nor appearance of it in the whole course of our Saviours own Ministry; he used to be an Example, as well as a Law-giver to the Church, he washed his Disciples Feet, before he enjoined them to wash one another; he exemplified the other Sacraments before he prescribed his Apostles to administer them, and one would have thought such an Instance of his Example had been more necessary in this business of Penance, rather than any other, if it had been but to make way for the Understanding of so obscure an Institution; since especially, one would have thought to find some Traces of this in the Ministry of our Saviour, because he daily conversed with Sinners, he reproved them, instructed them, healed them, pardoned them, but never brought any of them to such a Confession as we are treating of; viz. To a particular enumeration of their Sins with the circumstances, nor upon so doing formally absolved them. His very Disciples (some of which had been great Sinners) were admitted without it; the Woman of *Samaritan* was told by him all that ever she did, but she was not brought on her knees to make her own Confession; but most strange of all it is, that the Woman taken in Adultery, when he had made her Accusers sink away, was not privately brought to it; it may be they will say, there was no need of Confession to him who knew all before, but yet it might have been necessary to bring these Sinners to be ashamed of themselves by that means to work Repentance, and fit them for Pardon, at least if this Method had been of such mighty use and wonderful necessity as is pretended.

2. But to let pass that; in the next place it is matter of wonder that nothing of this Practice appears in the Ministry of the Apostles; they went about preaching the Gospel, calling Men to Repentance, erecting and governing Churches, but never set themselves down in a Confessors Chair, for Penitents secretly to tell them in their Ear the Story of their vicious Lives; indeed we read, *Acton* 9. 18. That some came in and shewed their Deeds? but first it was voluntary, and in a fit of holy Zeal,

for we cannot find that they were required to do it, as of Sacramental Obligation; and besides, the Confession was publick before the Church, not clancular, and whispered in secret; it is true also, that *St. James, chap. 5. 16.* advises the Christians to confess their faults one to another, (which is made a mighty evidence in this case;) but it is as true, that this was spoken in an extraordinary case, as appears *ver. 14.* in bodily sickness and distress of Conscience, they are advised to lay open their condition, in order to relief and succour, by the more ardent and affectionate Prayers of those who should be made privy to it, but it is not made a standing and universal rule for all men to comply with, whether they be sick or well, in prosperity or adversity, perplexed or quiet in their Consciences, much less of Sacramental and necessary obligation, as in the *Roman Church*.

3. Let us go on in the next ages after the Apostles, for about two hundred years we find not one word of this kind of Confession, which we enquire for. Indeed the writings of that time which are extant, are not many, but if this business had been of such consequence as is pretended, it is strange that those holy men, *Ignatius, Clemens, and Justin Martyr* should not have any mention of it.

Indeed *Bellarmine* brings us one instance within this period, and that is from *Ireneus*, who speaking of certain women who had been abused by *Marcion* the Heretick, saith they afterwards came and confessed all, with shame and sorrow, to the Church. But what is this to the purpose? We dispute not against publick Confession, which is acknowledged to be truly Primitive, and we wish it had been constantly maintained in after-ages, it is only the necessity of Clancular Confession that we are unsatisfied in, and this passage speaks nothing at all to that case.

4. In *Tertullian's* time, which was also much about two hundred years after our Saviour, we find great things said of Confession, but it is of that which was publick, and in the face of the Church, not to a Priest in a Corner; and this indeed was greatly encouraged and required by the holy Men of those times, as that which in the case of open and scandalous sins, freed the Church both from the guilt, and from the reproach of them, and in the case of secret sins, was a means (by open shame) to bring men to Repentance, and so to Pardon. And the Confession was principally directed to God, who was the person offended by the sin, yet it was made before men to raise a fervency in their Prayers, as is noted before, and to obtain their effectual intercession with God on behalf of the penitent. This that ancient Writer makes manifest to be his sense in his *Book de Pœnitentia* in these words, *Plerumque vero jejuniis preces alere, ingemiscere, lachrymari, & mugire dies noctesque ad Dominum Deum tuum,*

Presbyteris ad volvi, & aris (or rather *charis*) *dei adgeniculari, omnibus fratribus legationes sue deprecationis injungere, hac omnia ex homologesis ut pœnitentiam commendet, &c.* the penitent often joyns fasting to his prayers, weeps, wails, and moans night and day before God, casts himself at the feet of the Priests, kneels to all holy people, and intreats

Tert. Ap. c. 39 all the Brethren to be his Intercessors with God Almighty for his pardon: This is penitential Confession, &c. And

And in his Apology more plainly; *Coimus in Cætum, &c. ibidem exhortationes, castigationes & censura divina nam & judicatur magno cum pondere ut apud certos de Dei conspectu, summumq; futuri judicii præjudicium est si quis ita deliquerit ut à communione, &c. religetur;* we have (saith he) in our Ecclesiastical Assemblies, a spiritual Judicature, and with great gravity

Beatus Rhenan in præf. ad Tertul. de pœnitent.

censure Offenders, &c. But I need say no more of this; for we have the Testimony of *Beatus Rhenanus*, one of the Roman Church, and of great insight into Ecclesiastical Affairs, who gives us this account of *Tertullian* and his times, *nihil illum de clancularia illa pœnitentiâ loqui, quæ id temporis*

penitus ignorabatur; there was no such thing as secret or Clancular Confession in use in *Tertullian's* time, which was a thing not so much as known by the Christian Church in those days.

5. To go a little lower, such was the manner of proceedings in *St. Cyprian's* time, as he himself describes it, the sinner by outward gestures and tokens shew'd himself to be sorrowful and penitent for his sin, and then made humble Confession thereof before the whole Congregation, and desired all the Brethren to pray for him; which done, the Bishop and Clergy

Origen in Ps. 37.

Sozomen lib. 7. cap. 16.

laid their hands upon him, and so reconciled him: So it was also in *Origen's* time, and once for all, to deliver the Custom of the Church in those times, touching this particular, I will add the words of the Historian, *Rei ad terram se pronos abjiciunt, &c.* they that are conscious to

themselves to have offended, fall down flat upon the ground with weeping and lamentations in the Church, on the other side the Bishop runs to them with tears in his eyes, and falls down to the ground, also in token of sorrow and compassion, and the whole Congregation in the meanwhile sympathizing with both, is overwhelmed with tears, &c.

St. Chrysost. ad Hebr. Homil. 31 Id. in Serm. de Confess. & pœnit. &c.

6. If we go lower yet to the times of *St. Chrysostom* and *St. Austin*, we find those holy men speaking very slightly of Confession to men, so little did they think of Auricular Confessions being a Sacrament. *St. Austin's* Judgment in the Case we have heard before, in the tenth Book of his

Confessions, and third Chapter ; and for the other, the Testimonies out of him are so many, and so well known, that I cannot think it necessary to transcribe them ; and as for St. *Jerom* who lived about the same time, I think it sufficient to repeat the account of *Erasmus*, who was very conversant in his Writings, and indeed of all the other Fathers, and who had no other fault I know, but that he did use *Mordaci radere vero*, to be too great a Tell truth ; which sure will not invalidate his Testimony ; his words are these, *Apparet tempore Hieronimi nondum institutam fuisse secretam admissorum Confessionem.*— *Verum in hoc labuntur Theologi quidam parum attenti, quod quæ veteres scribunt de publica & generali confessione, ea trahunt ad occultam & longè diversi generis, i. e.* It is evident (saith he) that in St. *Jerom*'s time (which was about four hundred years after our Saviour) there was no such thing as secret Confession in use ; but the mistake is, that some few later and inconsiderate Divines have taken the instances of general and publick Confession then practised, for arguments of that Auricular Confession which is now used, though quite of a different nature from it.

Thus we have traced the Current of Antiquity for four or five hundred years to search for the Head of this *Nilus*, the source and rise of that kind of Confession which is so highly magnified by the Church of *Rome*, but hitherto we have found nothing of it, and this methinks should be sufficient to stagger an impartial inquirer, (at least it is as much as can be expected in so short a Treatise as this is intended to be) and may satisfy the unprejudicate, that there is as little of Antiquity to favour this Rite, as there is of Divine Institution to be pleaded for it. But yet I know on the other side, that the *Romanists* pretend to bring abundance of Testimonies for it, and *Bellarmino* particularly goes from Century to Century with his Citations to prescribe for the constant and uninterrupted use of it, but I do sincerely think that these four following short Observations will inable a man to answer them all.

1. I observe, that whereas this word *Exomologesis* is commonly used by divers of the Fathers, as the Phrase whereby they intend to express the whole nature of Repentance in all the parts and branches of it, as is evident by the passage I cited out of *Tertullian de Pœnit.* even now, and is acknowledged by *Bellarmino* himself ; nevertheless, meerly because that word signifies Confession properly, and nothing else, these *Romish* Sophisters, where they find this word *Exomologesis*, force it into an argument for that Confession, which they contend for ; and so several Discourses of the Fathers, concerning Repentance in general, are made to be nothing but *Exhortations* to, or *Encomiums* of Confession in particular, and that must be nothing else neither but Auricular Confession, the thing in Question.

tion. A cast of his skill in this way, *Bellarmino* gives us in *Irenaeus*, the very first Author he cites for Auricular Confession in the last quoted Book and Chapter of his Writings *De Sacramentis*.

2. Whereas the Novatians excluded all hopes of Repentance or Pardon for sins committed after Baptism, but the true Church contrariwise admitted to hopes of Pardon upon their Repentance; upon this occasion, when some of the Fathers justly magnify the advantages, and comfortableness of the true Church above the Schismatical, as that it set open a Door of Hope to those who confessed their sins, and applied themselves to her Ministry: Hence these witty men will persuade the world, that every true Church had a Confessors Chair, and such a formal way of pardoning as they now practise at *Rome*; as if there was no remission of Sin, where there was no Auricular Confession, and as if all that excluded the latter, rejected the former too, and were no better than Novatian Hereticks; when-as in Truth, the power of the Keys is exercised in all the Ministries of the Church, and she pardons and retains sins, otherwise than by the Oracle of a particular Confessor, as we

Bellarmino de Pœnit.

Lib. 3. C. 8.

have seen already. This piece of juggling the same *Bellarmino* is also guilty of in his Citation of *Lactantius*.

3. Whereas the ancient Writers are much in the commendation of Confession of sins, whether it be to God or to the Church, but generally intending that which is publick, it is common with those of the Church of *Rome*, to lay hold of all such sayings as were intended to persuade to, and encourage publick Confessions, and to apply them to Auricular or Clancular Confessions, thus particularly the afore-
Id. Lib. 3. C. 6. said Author does by *Tertullian* in his Citation of him.

4. And Lastly, Whereas it is also true that several of those holy men of old, do in some cases very much recommend Confession of secret sins, and persuade some sorts of men to the use of it, namely those that are in great perplexity of Conscience, and that needed Ghostly Counsel and Advice, or to the intent that they might obtain the assistance of the Churches Prayers, and make them the more ardent and effectual on their behalf, whereas I say, they recommended this as an expression of Zeal, or a prudent expedient, or at most as necessary only in some cases *pro hinc & nunc*. These great Patrons of Auricular Confession do with their usual artifice apply all these passages, to prove it to be a standing and universally necessary duty, a Law to all Christians, this is a very common fault amongst them, and particularly *St. Cyprian* is thus misapplied by the same forementioned Writer, *Lib. 3. Cap. 7.*

Hither

Hitherto inquiring into the most ancient and purest times of the Church, by the Writings of the Fathers of those times, we have not been able to discover any sufficient ground for such an Auricular Confession as the Church of *Rome* pretends to, much less for a constant and uninterrupted succession of it. But now after all I must acknowledge there is a passage in Ecclesiastical History which seems to promise us satisfaction herein, and therefore must by no means be slightly passed over without due consideration; it is the famous story of *Nectarius* Bishop of *Constantinople*, and Predecessor to *St. Chrysostom*, which hapned something less then four hundred years after our Saviour.

Socrat. H. st.
Lib. 5. Cap. 19.
Sozomen Lib 7.
C. 16.

The Story as it is related by the joint Testimony of *Socrates* and *Sozomen* runs thus: In the time of this *Nectarius* there was (it seems) a Custom in that Church (as also in most others) that one of the Presbyters of greatest Piety, Wisdom and Gravity should be chosen Penitentiary, that is, be appointed to the peculiar Office of receiving Confessions, and to assist and direct the Penitents in the management of their Repentance: Now it happens that a certain Woman of Quality, stricken with remorse of Conscience, comes to the Penitentiary (that then was) and according to Custom, makes a particular Confession of all such sins, as she was conscious to her self to have committed since her Baptism, for which he according to his Office appointed her the Penance of Fasting, and continual Prayers to expiate her Guilt, and give proof of the Truth of her Repentance. But she proceeding on very particularly in her Confessions, at last amongst other things comes to declare that a certain Deacon of that Church had lien with her; upon notice of which horrid Fact, the Deacon is forthwith cashiered, and cast out of the Church: by which means the miscarriage takes air, and coming to the knowledge of the people, they presently fall into a mighty commotion and rage about it, partly in detestation of so foul an action of the Deacon, but principally in contemplation of the dishonour and scandal thereby reflected on the whole Church. The Bishop finding the Honour of the whole Body of his Clergy extremely concern'd in this accident, and being very anxious what to do in this case, at last by the Counsel of one *Eudemon* a Presbyter of that Church, he resolves thenceforth to abolish the Office of Penitentiary, both to extinguish the present flame, and to prevent the like occasion for the future; and now by this means every man is left to the conduct of his own Conscience, and permitted to partake of the holy Mysteries at his own peril. This is the matter of Fact faithfully rendred from the words of the Historian; but this if we take it in the gross, and look no further then so, will not do much towards the deciding of the present

present Controversy, we will therefore examine things a little more narrowly by the help of such hints as those Writers afford us, perhaps we may make good use of it at last; and to this purpose,

1. I observe in the first place, that though at the first blush here seems to be an early and great example of that Auricular Confession which we oppose, forasmuch as here is not only the Order of the Church of *Constantinople*, for Confession to a Priest, but that to be of all sins committed after Baptism, and this to be made to him in secret; notwithstanding upon a more thorough view it will appear quite another thing from that pleaded for, and practised by the Church of *Rome*, and that especially in the respects following: First, In the Auricular Confession in the Story, there is some remainder of the ancient Discipline of the Church (whose Confessions used to be open and publick,) as I have shewed in that here a publick Officer is appointed by the Church to receive them, such an one as whose Prudence, and Learning, and Piety she could confide in for a business of so great nicety and difficulty, and it is neither left to the Penitent to choose his Confident for his Confessor, nor at large for every Priest to represent the Authority of the Church in so ticklish an Affair as that of Discipline, but to a publick Officer appointed by the Church for this purpose; so that Confession to him cannot be said to be private, seeing it is done to the whole Church by him. To confirm which, *Secondly*, This Penitentiary it seems was bound (as there was occasion) to discover the matters (opened to him in secret) to the Church, as appears in the Crime of the Deacon in the Story; there was no pretence of a Seal of Confession in this Case, as in the Church of *Rome*, by virtue of which a man may confess, and go on to sin again secretly, without danger of being brought upon the Stage, whatsoever the atrocity of his Crime be, and indeed without any effectual course in order to his Repentance and Reformation. Again, *Thirdly*, this confession in the Story doth not pretend to be of absolute necessity, as if a mans sins might not be pardoned without it; but only a prudent provision of the Church to help men forward in their Repentance, to direct the acts and expressions of it, and especially to relieve perplexed and weak consciences, and to assist them in their preparations for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and this appears, amongst other things, by the account which the Historian gives us of the consequence of abolishing it, *viz.* That now every man is left to his own conscience about his partaking of the holy Mysteries; but it is not said or intimated that he was left under the guilt of his sins, for want of confession. To which add in the last place, that this Office whatever it was, was not reputed a Sacrament, but rather, as I noted before, an expedient to prepare men for it; for doubtless neither that Bishop nor that

Publication of which would be attended with great inconveniences; for some Sins are of that nature, that they scarce can take Air without spreading a Contagion, some Confessions would make sport for light and vain persons, and besides abundance of other inconveniences (easie to be imagined by any one) the publication of some Sins might expose the Penitents to the severity of the Pagan Criminal Judge; upon these and such like considerations, the Church thought fit therefore (as I have intimated before) to appoint one wise and very grave person in her stead to receive the Confessions; who by his discretion might so discriminate matters, that what things were fit for silence, might have private methods applied to them, but what were fit to be brought upon the Stage, might be made publick examples of, or receive a publick remedy.

Secondly, But the Historian leads us to a more special reason of this Institution at that time; namely, that the rage of the *Decian* Persecution cruelly shook the Church, and abundance of her weaker members fell off in the storm, and, which was worst of all, the Church was distracted about the restitution or final rejection of those that had so miscarried; for though the best and wisest of the Church were so merciful and considerate of humane infirmity, as to be willing to receive those in again, upon Repentance, over whom the Temptation of Fear had too much prevailed, yet the Novatians, a great and zealous part of Christianity, looked upon such as desperate, who had once broken their Baptismal Vow, and would rather separate from the Church themselves, than suffer such to be restored to it. Here the Church was in a great strait, either she must be very severe to some, or she shall seem very unkind to others, she must either let the weak perish, or she must offend them that counted themselves strong. Now in this case she being both tenderly compassionate towards those that had fallen, and withal willing to satisfy those Novatian Dissenters, or at least to deliver her self from Scandal, takes this course, she requires that those who had fallen, and desired to be restored again to her Society, should acknowledge their faults, and make all the Penitent satisfaction that was possible for them to perform, that so neither they may be too easily tempted to do so again by the gentleness of the remedy, nor the Novatians reproach her Lenity, or take pet, as if no difference was made between the sound and the lapsed; for these causes, though the most publick Penance was thought little enough to be undergone by the lapsed; but yet on the other side, considering wisely the inconveniences of publick Penance in some cases (as I specified before) she therefore took this middle course; namely, she appointed a publick Confessor, who having first heard privately the several cases of the Penitents, should bring into publick, only such of them as without incurring any

any of the aforesaid dangers) might be made exemplary. And this appears to be the true reason of this Institution, and the bottom of this affair, by this remarkable passage in the Historian; That whereas the generality of the Orthodox closed presently with this wise temperament, the novatians only, those self-conceited Non-conformists, rejected *οὐκ ἔδοξε αὐτοῖς*, this expedient as a new invention; they were too humourful to comply with such a temperament.

But here another question arises, *viz.* How far this new expedient was imbraced by the Orthodox Churches; for if it was only received by that of *Constantinople*, the Authority would not be so great; for it is impossible to imagine, that other Churches might allow every private Priest to confess, and so admit of no publick Penitentiary.

To which I answer, that by the History it seems plain enough, that this was not the peculiar manner of the Church of *Constantinople* only, but the usual method in that time of most other Churches also; but I must needs say, I do not find that the Church of *Rome* complied with them herein, though it was not much to her Honour to be singular, where there was so much prudence and piety to have inclined her to uniformity. However this is gained, which is my point, that the Church of *Rome* is not countenanced in her practice of private and clancular Confessions, by the general usage of the Church, as they pretend.

3. I observe concerning this Office of Penitentiary, that as it was erected upon prudential considerations, so it was upon the same grounds abolished, by the same authority of the Church which first instituted it, and that after about two hundred years continuance in the time of *Nectarius*, as we have seen; and therein he was followed, saith *Sozomen* by almost all the Bishops and Churches in the World; this therefore was far from being thought either a Divine or Apostolical Constitution: *Petavius* would here perswade us, that it was only publick Confession, and not private, which was upon this occasion so generally laid aside, as we have seen, but this is done by him more out of tenderness of Auricular Confession, than upon good reason; and *Valesius* goes beyond him, and will needs perswade us, that neither publick nor private Confession were put down in this juncture, but only that the lately erected Officer of Penitentiary was cashiered; but I must crave leave to say, there is no sufficient reason for either of these conjectures, but on the contrary plain evidence against them; for *Socrates*, who is the first and principal relater of this whole story, saith he was personally acquainted with this Presbyter *Eudemon*, who gave the advice to *Nectarius* to make this change in the Discipline of the Church, and that he had the aforesaid relation of it from his own mouth, and expounded with him about it, giving his reasons

sons to the contrary, and suggested his suspicions that the state of Piety would be much endamaged by this change, and in plain words tell him, that he had now bereft men of assistance in the conduct of their Consciences, and hindred the great benefit men have, or might have one of another by private advice and correption. Now this fear of his had been the absurdest thing in the World, if upon this counsel and advice of his, only one certain man in the Office of publick Confessor had been laid aside, but both the use of publick and private Confessions had been kept up and retained.

But after all (for ought appears) the Church of *Rome* kept her old Mumpsimus, she tenacious of her own customs, especially of such as may advance her Interest and Authority, complies not with this Innovation or Reformation (be it for better or worse) but her Priests go on with their Confessions, and turn all Religion almost into Clancular Transactions, in despite of the example of other Churches. It may be she met with opposition sometimes, but she was forced to dissemble it till the heroick age of the Schoolmen, and then those lusty Champions with their Fustian-stuff of *videtur quod sic, & probatur quod non*, make good all her pretensions. After them in the year 1215 comes the fourth *Lateran* Council, and that decrees Auricular Confession to be made by every body once a year at the least; and last of all comes the Council of *Trent*, and declares it to be of Divine Institution, necessary to Salvation, and the constant and universal custom of the Christian Church: And so we have the Pedigree of the *Romish* Auricular Confession.

SECT. 4. I come now to the third and last Stage of my undertaking, which is to shew that secret or Auricular Confession, as it is now prescribed and practised in and by the Church of *Rome*, is not only unnecessary, and burdensom in it self, but also very mischievous to Piety, and the great ends of Christian Religion.

For the former part of this charge, if it be not evident enough already, it will easily be made out from the premises, for they cannot deny that they make this kind of Confession necessary to Salvation, at least as necessary as Baptism it self is, (supposing a man hath sinned after Baptism) now if it be neither made so by Divine Institution, nor acknowledged to be so by the constant Opinion of the Church, what an horrible imposition is here upon the consciences of men, when in the highest and worst sense that can be, they teach for *Doctrines the Commandments of Men*, and make Salvation harder than God hath made it, and suspend mens hopes upon other terms then he hath done? If it was prescribed by the present Church as a matter of Order and Discipline only, or of convenience and expediency, we should never boggle at it upon this account,

count, or dispute the point with them; or if it was only declared necessary *pro hic & nunc*, upon extraordinary emergency, by the peculiar condition of the Penitent, his weakness of judgment, the perplexity of his Conscience, his horrible guilt or extreme agonies, we would not differ with them upon that neither; but when it is made necessary universally, and declared the indispensable duty of all men whatsoever who have sinned after Baptism (when God hath required no such thing but declares himself satisfied with true contrition and hearty remorse for what is past, and sincere Reformation for the time to come;) this I say is an intolerable tyranny and usurpation upon the consciences of men. And that is not all neither, for besides its burdensomness in the general, it particularly aggravates and increases a mans other burdens, for instead of relieving perplexed Consciences, which is the true and principal use of Confessions to Men, this priestly Confession as it is prescribed by the Council, intangles and afflicts them more; for that enjoyns that the Penitent lay open all his sins, even the most secret, although but in thought or desire only, such as against the ninth or tenth Commandment, (according to their Division of the Decalogue,) now this is many times difficult enough; but that's not all, he must also recount all the circumstances of these sins, which may increase or diminish the guilt, especially such as *alter the species and kind of sine*. Now what sad work is here for a melancholy Man? All the circumstances are innumerable, and how can he tell which are they that change the species of the act, unless he be as great a Schoolman as his Confessor. Besides all this, it may be he is not very skilful in the distinction between venial and mortal sins, and if he omit one mortal sin, he is undone; therefore it is necessary for him (by consequence) to confess all venial sins too, and then where shall the poor Man begin, or when shall he make an end? Such a *Carnificina* such a rack and torture, in a word, such an holy Inquisition is this business of Auricular Confession become. And that Eminent Divine of *Strasburgh* (of whom *Beatus Rhenanus* speaks) seems very well to have understood both himself, and this matter who pronounces that *Scorus* and *Thomas* had with their tricks and subtilties, so perplexed this plain business of Confession, that now it was become plainly impossible. And so much for that.

But as for the second part of this impeachment, *viz.* That the Auricular Confession now used in the Church of *Rome*, is mischievous to Piety; This remains yet to be demonstrated, and we will do it the rather in this place, because it will be an abundant Confirmation of all that which hath been discoursed under the two former Heads; and might indeed have saved the labour of them, but that we were unwilling to leave any pretence of theirs undiscussed; for if this practice of theirs appear to be

mischievous to Piety, it will never by any sober man be thought either to have been instituted by our Saviour, or to have been the sense and usage of the Catholick Church, whatever they pretend on its behalf.

Now therefore this last and important part of my Charge I make good by these Three Articles following.

First, This Method of theirs is dangerous to Piety, as it is very apt to cheat people into an Opinion that they are in a better condition than truly they are, or may be in towards God, as that their sins are pardoned, and discharged by him, when there is no such matter. The Churchmen of Rome complain of the Doctrine of some reformed Divines touching assurance of Salvation, that it fills men with too great confidence, and renders them careless and presumptuous; but whatsoever there is in that, it is not my business now to dispute it, however methinks it will not very well become a *Romanist* to aggravate it, till he have acquitted himself in the point before us; for by this Assurance Office of theirs they comply too much with the self-flattery of Mens own Hearts, they render Men secure, before they are safe, and furnish them with a confidence like that of the Whore *Solomon* speaks of, *who wipes her Mouth, and saith, I have done no evil.* For Men return from the Confessors Chair (as they are made to believe) as pure as from the Font, and as innocent as from their Mothers Womb; as if God was concluded by the act of the Priest, and as if he being satisfied with an humble posture, a dejected look, and a lamentable murmur, God Almighty would be put off so too.

Ab! nimium faciles qui tristia crimina, &c.

*Ab! cheating Priests, who made fond Men believe,
That God Almighty pardons all you shrieve.*

Perhaps they will say, This is the fault and folly of the Men, not of the Institution of the Church: But why do they not teach them better then? Nay, why do they countenance and encourage them in so dangerous mistakes? For whether else tend those words in the *Seff. 14. Can. 1.* Decree of the Council of Trent, *Ipsi Deo reconciliandis? q. d.* that by this way of Confession, &c. Men are reconciled to the Divine Majesty himself; or those other forecited, where the Priest is said to be the *Vicar of Christ, and in his stead, a Judge or President; or especially what other meaning can those words have, where it is said, that*

this

this Rite is as necessary as Baptism, for as in that all sins are remitted which were committed in former time, so in this all sins committed after Baptism are likewise remitted? Ibid. Cap. 2.

Now, I say, what is the natural tendency of all this, but to make people believe that their Salvation or Damnation is in the power of the Priest, that he is a little God Almighty, and his Discharge would certainly pass current in the Court of Heaven. But there is Sophistry and Juggle in all this, as I thus make appear; for,

1. The Priest cannot pardon whom he will, let him be called *Judex* and *Præses* never so; for if his Sentence be not according to Law, it will be declared Null at the Great Day; only it may be good and valid in the mean time *in foro Ecclesie*; and here lies the Cheat.

2. Nor are all sins retained or unforgiven with God, that are not pardoned by the Priest; it is true in publick Scandals, till the Sinner submit to the Church, God will not forgive him; *For what that binds on Earth is in this sense bound in Heaven*; but what hath the Church to do to retain, or to bind the Sinner in the case of secret Sins, where it can charge no Guilt on him?

3. Nor is it properly the act of the Priest which pardons, but the Tenor of the Law, and the disposition of mind in the Penitent agreeable thereunto, qualifying him for Pardon, to which the Pardon is to be imputed: As it is not the Herald which pardons, but the Prince who by his Proclamation bestows that Grace upon those who are so and so qualified.

4. Nor, lastly, Can the Priest be said to pardon so properly by those Majestick words, *absolvo te*, as by his whole Ministry, in instructing people in the Terms of the New Covenant, and making application of that to them by the Sacraments; this he hath Commission to do, but those big words I cannot find that he hath any where Authority to pronounce, and therefore (as I think I observed before) the ancient Church had no form of Absolution, but only receiving Penitents to the Communion: And the *Greek Church* had so much Modesty as to absolve in the third Person, not in the first, to shew that their Pardon was Ministerial and Declarative only.

All these things notwithstanding the people are let to go away with such an Opinion as aforesaid (because it is for the Grandeur and Interest of the Priesthood, that they should be cheated;) but these misapprehensions would vanish, if their Teachers would be so just as to distinguish between Gods Absolution, and the Absolution of the Church; the first of which extends to the most secret Sins, the latter to open Scandals only; the one delivers from all real Guilt, the other from external
Censure

Censure only; of the latter the Priest may (by the leave of the Church) have the full Dispensation, so that he is really pardoned with her that hath satisfied the Priest; but of the former he dispenses but conditionally. To confirm all which I will here add only two Testimonies of the Judgment of the ancient Church.

The first is of *Firmilianus* Bishop of *Cæsaria* in his Epistle to *St. Cyprian*, reckoned the Seventy fifth of *St. Cyprians*, where speaking of holding Ecclesiastical Councils every Year, he gives these Reasons for it; *Ut si qua graviora sunt communi consilio dirigantur, lapsis quoque fratribus, & post lavacrum salutare à Diabolo vulneratis, per poenitentiam medela quærat; non quasi à nobis remissionem peccatorum consequantur, sed ut per nos ad intelligentiam delictorum suorum convertantur, & Domino plenius satisfacere cogantur*; Partly (saith he) that by joint advice, and common consent, we may agree upon an uniform Order in such weighty affairs as concern our respective Churches, partly that we may give relief, and apply a remedy to those, who by the Temptation of the Devil have fallen into sin after Baptism; not that we can give them Pardon of their Sin, but that by our Ministry they may be brought to a knowledge of their Sins, and directed into a right course to obtain Pardon at the Hands of God. The other is of *Theodorus*

Theod. Cantuar. apud Beat. Rhen. in Præf. ad Tertull. de Pœnit.

Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury*, whose Words are these: *Confessio quæ soli Deo fit purgat peccata: Ea vero quæ Sacerdoti fit, docet qualiter purgentur*. Confession to God properly obtains the Pardon of Sin; but by Confession to Men, we are only put into the right way to obtain Pardon. Thus they.

But now in the Church of *Rome* the case is otherwise; there the Priest sustains the Person of our Lord *Jesus Christ* himself, and is not so much his Delegate as his Plenipotentiary, and his Pardon is as full & good as if the Judge of the World had pronounced it *pro Tribunali*; so that if the most lewd and habitual Sinner have but the good fortune to go out of the World under the Blessing of his Ghostly Father, that is to say, either Death came so soon after his last Absolution, or the Priest came so opportunely after his last Sin, that he hath not begun a new score, he is sure to go to Heaven without more ado. This I represent as the first mischief attending their Doctrine, and Practice of Auricular Confession. But this is not all, for

Secondly, It corrupts and debauches the very Doctrine and Nature of Repentance which the whole Gospel lays so much stress upon: Making Attrition (which is but a slight sorrow for sin, or a dislike of it in Contemplation of the Wrath of God impendent over it) pass for Contrition, which implies an hatred and detestation of it for its own moral evil and deformity, with a firm resolution of amendment. This they

they many of them are not ashamed to teach, and their practice of Absolution supposes and requires it. The Jesuits in particular, who have almost ingrossed to themselves the whole Monopoly of Confessions avow this as their Principle. Father Banny, Escobar, and Suarez declare their Judgement, that the Priest ought to absolve a Man upon his saying, that he detests his Sin, although at the same time the Confessor doth not believe that he does so. And Caussin saith, *If this be not true, there can be no use of Confessions amongst the greatest part of Men.*

These things (it's true) are disliked by some others of the Romanists, and the Curres of France are so honest as to cry shame of it before all the World; for, say they, Attrition is but the work of Nature, and if that alone will serve for Pardon, then a Man may be pardoned without Grace. But therefore, say the others, the Sacrament of Penance doth it alone, and this is for the Honour of the Sacrament, greatly for the Honour of it (say I) that it is of greater Power than our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Gospel, which cannot help a wicked Man to Heaven, whilst he continues so, but this Sacrament it seems can. Nor can they excuse this matter by saying these odious Assertions are but the private Opinions of some Divines. For they are plainly favoured by the determinations of the Council of Trent; I confess that Council delivers it self warily and cunningly in this point (as it uses to do in such cases) yet these are their words, *Illā vera contritio imperfecta quæ attritio dicitur, quamvis sine Sacramento Pœnitentiæ per se ad justificationem perducere peccatorem nequeat, tamen eam ad Dei Gratiā in Sacramento Pœnitentiæ impetrandam disponit, &c.* Which is as much as to say, though Attrition or a superficial sorrow for sin, barely, alone, and without confession to a Priest, will not justify a man before God, yet Attrition and Confession together will do it, for then they are as good as true Repentance. And in this sense Melchior Canus long since thought he understood the Council well enough.

Thirdly, This business of Auricular Confession, as it is practised in the Church of Rome, is so far from being a means to prevent and restrain sin, as it highly pretends to be (and I am sure as it ought to be, if it be good for any thing) that contrariwise it is either lost labour, and a meer Ceremony, or it greatly encourages and imboldens, and hardens men in it, both by the secrecy, the multitudes, and the frequency of these Confessions, by the cursory, hypocritical and evasive ways of confessing, by the slight Penances imposed, and the cheapness, easiness, and even prostitution of Absolutions.

It were easy to be copious in instances of all these kinds, but it is an uncomfortable subject, and I hasten to a conclusion; therefore I will only touch upon them briefly.

1. For the privacy of these Confessions. In the ancient Church (as I have noted before) the scandalous sinner was brought upon the Stage before a great assembly of grave and holy men, he lay prostrate on the ground, which he watered with his Tears, he crept on his knees, and implored the pity and prayers of all present, in whose countenances (if for shame he could look up) he saw abhorrence of his fact, indignation at Gods dishonour, conjoined with compassion to his soul, and joy for his Repentance; his Confession was full of remorse and confusion; the remedy was as sharp and disgustful to flesh and blood as the Disease had been pleasant, and the pain of this Expiation was able to imbitter the sweet of Sin to him ever after. Or if the Confession was not made before the whole Church, but to the Penitentiary only, yet he was a grave and holy person, chosen by the Church, and representing it, a person resident in that Church, and so able to take notice of, and mind the future conversation of those that addressed themselves to him; a person of that sanctity and reverence, that he could not choose but detest and abhor all base and vile actions that should come to his knowledge: Now it must needs be a terrible cut to a Sinner to have all his lewdness laid open before such an one, and then to be justly and sharply rebuked by him, to have his sins aggravated, and to be made to see his own ugly shape in a true glass held by him, besides to be enjoined the performace of a strict Penance of Fasting and Prayer, and after all (if this do not do) to have the Church made acquainted with the whole matter (as in the case of the Deacon aforesaid. This course was likely to work something of remorse in the Sinner for what was past, and to make him watchful and careful for the time to come.

But what is the way of the Church of *Rome* like to this? Where a man may confess to any Priest, to him that knows him not, and so cannot observe his future life and carriage; nay, perhaps that knows not how to value the guilt of sin, or to judge which be venial, and which mortal Sins, or especially what circumstances do alter the species of it, and it may be too, he may be such an one that makes no Conscience himself of the sins I confess to him. Now, when all is transacted between me and such a Priest in a corner, and that under the inviolable Seal of Confession, what great shame can this put me to? What remorse is it likely to work in me? What shall discourage me from going on to *sin again, if no worse thing happen to me?*

2. And then for the multitude of Confessions in the Church of *Rome*, that also takes off the shame, and weakens the efficacy of it, so that if it do no harm, it is not likely to do any good; for who is concern'd much in the doing that which he sees all the world do as well as himself; if only

notorious Sinners were brought to Confession (as it was in the Primitive Church) then it might probably and reasonably provoke a blush, and cause a remorse in him to whom such a remedy was prescribed; but when he sees the whole Parish, and the Priest too brought to it, and men as generally complying with it, as they approach to the Lord's Table; what great wonders can this work? what shame can it inflict upon any man! what effect can be expected from it, but that it ordinarily makes men secure and careless, and grow as familiar with sin, as with the remedy, or at least think as well of themselves as of other men, since it seems they have as much need of Confession and Absolution as himself?

3. To which the frequency and often repetitions of these kind of Confessions adds very much; it is very likely that modesty may work much upon a man the first or second time he goes to Confession, and it may something discompose his countenance when he lays open all his secret miscarriages, to a person especially for whom he hath a Reverence (for we see every thing, even sin it self is modest in its beginnings;) and no doubt it is some restraint of sin whilst a man is sensible that he must undergo a great deal of pain and shame in vomiting up again his sweet morsels which he eats in secret: But by that time he hath been used to this a while, it grows easy and habitual to him, and custom hath made the very punishment pleasant as well as the sin; especially, if we add,

4. The formal, cursory, hypocritical, and illusive ways of Confession in frequent use amongst them; as that a man may choose his own Priest, and then to be sure the greatest Sinner will have a Confessor right for his turn, that shall not be too severe and scrupulous with him; that a man may confess *in transitu*, in a hurry or huddle, and then there can be no remark made upon his person nor his sins; that a man may make one part of his Confession to one Priest, and reserve the other part for another, so that neither of them shall be able to make any thing of it; that he may have one Confessor for his mortal sins, and another for his venial; so that one shall save him, if the other damn him; nay, for failing, the forgetful Sinner may have another man to confess for him, or at least he may confess, that he hath not confessed. These and abundance more such illusive methods are in daily use amongst them, and not only taken up by the licentious and unconscionable people, but allowed by some or other of their great Casuists: now let any Man judge whether this be a likelier way to restrain sin, or to encourage it; whether the easiness of the remedy (if this be one) must not of necessity make the Disease seem not very formidable? In a word? whether this be not a ridiculing their own Religion, and, which is worse, a teaching men to be fool-hardy, as to make a mock of sin.

5. This sad reckoning will be inflamed yet higher, if we consider the slight Penances usually imposed by these spiritual Judges upon the greatest Crimes. The Council determines that the Confessor must be exactly made acquainted with all the circumstances of the sin, that so he may be able to adjust a Penance to it; now when some great sin is confessed, and that in very foul circumstances, if the Penance proportioned to it, by the Priest, be to say two or three *Pater Nosters*, or *Ave-Maria's* extraordinary, to give a little Money in Alms to the Poor, or some pious use, to kneel on his bare knees before such a Shrine, to kiss such an Image, to go on pilgrimage a few miles to such a Saint, or at most to wear an Hair-Shirt, or it may be to fast with Fish, and Wine, and Sweetmeats, &c. doth not this make that sin which is thus mawled and stigmatized, look very dreadfully; can any man find in his heart to sin again, when it hath cost him so dear already?

Oh! but they will tell us, these Penances are not intended to correspond with the guilt of the sin, but only to satisfy the debt of temporal punishment. But we had thought that the end of Penance had been, to work in the Penitent a disposition for Pardon, by giving him both opportunities and direction to express the sincerity of his Repentance; and this was the use of Penance in the Primitive Church, together with the taking off the Scandal from the Society; and for that other end how doth the Church of *Rome* know so certainly that there is a debt of temporal punishment remaining due, after the sin is pardoned before God; it is true, God may pardon so far only as he pleases, he may resolve to punish temporally those whom he hath forgiven eternally, as we see he did in the case of *David*; but that this is not his constant method, appears by this, that our Saviour releases the temporal punishment to many in the Gospel, whose Diseases he cured, saying to them, *Your sins are forgiven you*, when as yet it did not appear that all scores were quitted with God so, but that they might have perished eternally, if they did not prevent it by Faith and Repentance.

6. But lastly, to come to an end of this sad story, the easiness and prostitution of their Absolutions in the Church of *Rome* contributes as much to the encouraging of Vice, and carelessness in Religion, as any of the former; for what else can be the natural effect and consequence of that ruled case among their Casuists (as I shew'd before) that the Priest is bound to absolve him that confesses, and saith, he is sorry for his sin, though he doth in his heart believe that he is not contrite, but that either the Priests Pardon is a very cheat, or else that Pardon is due of course to the most impenitent Sinner, and there is no more to do but *Confess and be Saved*? or what is the meaning of their common practice to absolve men upon

upon their Death-beds, whether they be contrite, or attrite, or neither, at least when they can give no Evidence of either? If they intended this only for absolution from the Censures of the Church it might be called Charity, and look something like the practice of the primitive Church, which released those upon their Death-beds, whom it would not discharge all their lives before, tho not then neither without signs of Attrition and contrition too; but these pretend to quite another thing; namely to release men *in foro conscientie*, and to give them a Pass-port to Heaven without Repentance, which is a very strange thing, to say no worse of it. Or to instance one thing more, what is the meaning of their practice of giving Absolution before the Penance is performed (as is usual with them) unless this be it, that whether the Man make any Conscience at all how he lives hereafter, yet he is pardoned as much as the Priest can do it for him, and is not this a likely way of reformation.

I conclude therefore now upon the whole matter that Auricular Confession, as it is used in the Church of *Rome*, is only an Artifice of greatening the Priest, and pleasing the people; a trick of gratifying the devout and impious as well as the Devout and Religious; the latter it imposes upon by its outward appearance of Humility and Piety; to the former it serves for a palliative Cure of the Gripes of Conscience which they are now and then troubled with; in reality it tends to make sin easy and tolerable by the cheapness of its Pardon, and in a word, it is nothing but the old Discipline of the Church in Dust and Ashes. And therefore though the Church of *England* in her Liturgy, piously wishes for the Restauration of the Ancient Discipline of the Church, it can be no defect in her that she troubles not her self with this Rubbish.

F I N I S.

A POSTSCRIPT.

After I had finished the foregoing Papers, and most part of them had also past the Press, I happened to have notice that there was a Book just then come over from *France*, written by a Divine of the *Sorbone*, which with great appearance of Learning maintained the just contrary to what I had asserted (especially in the Historical part of this Question) and pretended to prove from the most Ancient Monuments of the holy Scriptures, Fathers, Popes, and Councils, that Auricular Confession had been the constant Doctrine, and universal and uninterrupted usage of the Christian Church for near 1300 years from the times of our Saviour to the *Lateran Council*.

So soon as I heard this, I heartily wished, that either the said Book had come out a little sooner, or at least that my Papers had been yet in my hands, to the intent that it might have been in my power to have corrected what might be amiss, or supplied what was defective in that short Discourse, or indeed if occasion were, to have wholly suppress it.

For as soon as I entred upon the said Book, and found from no less a man than the Author himself, that he had diligently read over all that had been written on both sides of this controversy, and that this work of his was the product of eighteen years study, and that in the prime of his years, and most flourishing time of his parts, that it was published upon the maturest deliberation on his part, and with the greatest applause and approbation of the Faculty, I thought I had reason to suspect, whether a small Tract, written in haste by a man of no Name, and full enough of other Business, could be fit to be seen on the same day with so elaborate a work.

But by that time I had read a little further, I took heart, and permitted the Press to go on ; and now, that I have gone over the whole, I do here profess sincerely, that in all that learned Discourse, I scarcely found any thing which I had not foreseen, and as I think in some measure prevented. But certain I am, nothing occurred that staggered my judgment, or which did not rather confirm me in what I had written ; for though I met with abundance of Citations, and a great deal of wit and dexterity in the management of them, yet I found none of them come home to the point ; for whereas they sometimes recommend and press Confession of Sin in general sometimes to the Church, sometimes to the Priest

Priest or Bishop as well as to God Almighty: Again, sometimes they speak great things of the Dignity of the Priesthood, and the great Honour that Order hath in being wonderfully useful to the relief of guilty or afflicted consciences, other while they treat of the power of the Keys, and the authority of the Church, the danger of her Censures, the comfort of her Absolution, and the severity of her Discipline, &c. but all these things are acknowledged by us without laborious proof, as well as by our Adversaries: That which we demand, and expect therefore, is, where shall we find in any of the Ancient Fathers, Auricular Confession said to be a Sacrament, or any part of one? Or where is the universal necessity of it asserted? Or that secret sins committed after Baptism, are by no other means, or upon no other terms pardoned with God, then upon their being confessed to men? In these things lies the hinge of our Dispute, and of these particulars one ought in reason to expect the most direct and plain proof imaginable, if the matter was of such consequence, of such universal practice and notoriety as they pretend; but nothing of all this appears in this Writer more than in those that have gone before him. In contemplation of which I now adventure this little Tract into the World, with somewhat more of confidence than I should have done, had it not been for this occasion.

But lest I should seem to be too partial in the Case, or to give too slight an account of this Learned man's performance, the Reader who pleases shall be judge by a Specimen or two, which I will here briefly represent to him.

The former of them shall be the very first argument or testimony he produces for his Assertion, which I the rather make my choice to give instance in, because no man can be said ingenuously to seek for faults, to pick and choose for matter of exception, that takes the first thing that comes to hand.

The business is this, Chap. 2. Page 11. of his book he cites the Council of *Illiberis* (with a great deal of circumstance) as the first witness for his cause, and the testimony is taken from the Seventy sixth Canon, the words are these, *Si quis diaconum, &c. i. e.* If any man shall suffer himself to be ordained Deacon, and shall afterwards be convicted to have formerly committed some Mortal (or Capital Crime;) if the said Crime come to light by his own voluntary confession, he shall for the space of three years be debarred the holy Communion, but in case his sin be discovered and made known to the Church by some other hand, then he shall suffer five years suspension, and after that be admitted only to Lay Communion.

Now who would have ever thought this passage fit to be made choice of

of as the first proof of Auricular Confession, or who can imagine it should be any proof at all, much less a clear or direct one?

Oh, but here is Confession! it may happen so if the party please, but it is not enjoined, but voluntary, and that not Auricular neither, but unto the Church, at least for ought appears.

And it is confession of a secret sin too! True it was so, till it was either confessed or betrayed.

And here is Penance imposed for a secret sin : True when it was become publick.

And here is a different degree of Penance imposed upon him that ingenuously confesses, from him that stays till he is accused, and hath his sin proved upon him: And good Reason, for the one gave tokens of Repentance, and the other none. But then here is ——— What? no Sacrament of Penance, no declared absolute necessity of Confession to men in order to pardon with God, but only a necessity that when the fact is become notorious, whether by the Confession of the party, or otherwise, that the Church use her endeavours to bring the Sinner to Repentance, and free her self from Scandal by making a difference betwixt the Good and the Bad, the more hopeful, and the less.

If this be a clear and proper Argument for the necessity of Auricular Confession: God help poor *Protestants* that cannot discern it; but oh the wit of man, and the power of Learning and Logick! What may not such Men prove if they have a mind to it?

The other passage I instance in, is in his tenth Chapter, Page 156 viz. the Critical and Famous business of the *Nestarian* Reformation at *Constantinople*, of which I have spoken somewhat largely in the foregoing Papers. Now for this : This Learned Gentleman after he hath acknowledged very frankly that publick confession of sins was the ancient use of the Church in the times of *St. Irenaus*, *Tertullian*, *Cyprian*, and *Origen*; that is, for the space of about three hundred years, and that instead of that ancient usage (upon occasion of the *Decian* Persecution) a publick Penitentiary was appointed at *Constantinople*, and most other Orthodox Churches, and in short, after he had with more ingenuity than some others of his party, owned the undoubted Truth of the Relations of *Socrates* and *Sozomen* touching this Affair, and made some Observations thereupon not much to the advantage of his cause, he at length delivers that which would be very much to his purpose, if it could be credible; namely; that upon the whole matter *Nestarius* in abolishing the Penitentiary, neither abolished publick nor private Confessions, but instead of obliging men to go to the Penitentiary left every man bound to resort to his respective *Diocesan*, and confess his sins to him; and so Auricular Confes-

Confession is after this change every whit as necessary as it was before; very true (say I) it is as necessary now as it was before, for it was only voluntary before, and so it may be after. But if the intention of *Nectarius*, and the effect of that alteration was only the change of the Person, and every man still obliged to confess to some body, how comes it to be said in the story that every man was left to his own Conscience, doth that word signify the Bishop? then we have found out a right Fanatick *Dio-cesan*, for they will all readily confess to this Bishop, and believe his Absolution as sufficient as any *Romanist* of them all doth: And yet it seems to be undeniably plain that *Soerates* after this Reformation thought of no other Confessor but this, nor imagined men now bound to make any other Confession, but this (which if it was not Auricular was very secret) for otherwise how comes it to pass that he expostulates the matter with *Eudemon*, who advised this change, and bewail'd the danger of this liberty which was hereby given men, if they were as strictly bound still to confess to their Bishop as they were before to the Penitentiary; therefore the Truth of the business seems evidently to be this, that men were now at liberty to make their Confessions of secret sins voluntarily, as they were no doubt before the Institution of a Penitentiary. And now what hath this Learned Gentleman gotten by mustering up this story; well, however the conclusion must be held, let the Premises look to themselves.

I could find in my heart (now my hand is in) to proceed further, and to observe what pittiful shifts he is put to in his thirteenth Chapter, to evade the Testimonies brought by Monsieur *Daille* out of *St. Chrysostom* against his *Hypothesis*. And the rather because (out of meer tediousness of writing) I in the foregoing Papers omitted to specify the most remarkable Discourses which that Excellent Author hath upon this subject. But the Authorities are so plain and unanswerable, and the Evasions of this Gentleman so forced and palpable, that I think it needless to go about to vindicate the one, or confute the other; for in spite of Art this same thirteenth Chapter (we speak of) will afford no less than thirteen Arguments against the necessity of Auricular Confession.

F I N I S.