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A N  
ACCOUNT  
O F  
Two MOTIONS  
Made in the  
Lower House  
O F  
CONVOCAATION,  
Concerning  
The Power of *Remitting Sins.*

---

B Y  
R. CANNON, D. D. Arch-deacon of  
NORFOLK.

---

L O N D O N:  
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A N  
A C C O U N T  
O F T W O  
M O T I O N S  
Made in the  
L O W E R H O U S E  
O F  
C O N V O C A T I O N .

**I**T is now six Weeks since I first saw a Letter in Print to Dr. *Brett*, giving Account, That on *Friday, Feb. 22.* in the Chapel of *Henry VII.* One *Arch-deacon, Dr. C——*, said a great deal on Occasion of a Sermon of *Dr Brett*, concerning *Remission of Sins.* In reading the Let-

ter I observed many Passages there set down, as spoken by Dr. C. which I did not speak ; nor indeed did use any Words to the same Effect. I contented my self at that time with marking those Passages, and on *Friday, March 7.* took Occasion to observe in the House, That what I had said was greatly misrepresented in the Letter.

But the Writer of *the Political State of Great-Britain*, for the Month of *February*, having transcrib'd from that Letter, what is there said to have passed in the Lower House of *Convocation*, Feb. 22. with relation to Dr. *Brett's* Sermon, and having put down my Name at length ; and the Writer of the 2d Part of *The Nation vindicated*, &c. having quoted from that Letter a Passage, which, as I hear, goes generally for my Words, I can't but think it proper, *First*, To rectify some of the Mistakes made in those Books, as far as concerns me. *Secondly*, To give the Substance of another Motion I made, pursuant to the former, on *March 7.* And, *Thirdly*, To lay down more distinctly the main Grounds of both those Motions.

On *Feb. 22.* as soon as it was known Prayers were over in the Upper House, the Lower House went up with a Paper,

to acquaint their Lordships with our Opinion, That it was more adviseable and unexceptionable, to begin the Business de novo, than to proceed where the Synod left off at the Close of last Session of Parliament ; and the Prolocutor then deliver'd back to their Lordships the Papers of Business, which they had sent down.

The Prolocutor and Members being return'd to their House, and sitting silent for some time, I offer'd to the Consideration of the House a Matter, (*viz.* the Doctrine of *Remission of Sins*) which, I thought, had relation to, and being well considered, would be a good Preparation toward regulating Proceedings in Excommunication ; which, as being the first and most important Business before them, I conceiv'd the House would enter upon, when they should think fit to proceed. So I express'd my self. And then I produced Dr. *Brett's* Sermon of *Remission of Sins*, observing at the same time, that it had been of late preach'd to several great Congregations in Town, and that much Offence had been taken at it.

Having read the Title and the Text, I first read, out of the Sermon, those Passages, which shew how sensible the Doctor was, that the Doctrine he was delivering  
was

was very extraordinary ; p. 13. ‘ What  
 ‘ indeed they had very seldom, but should  
 ‘ frequently have heard from their Pastors  
 ‘ and Ministers, whose Duty it is, says he,  
 ‘ to *declare unto you all the Council of God,*  
 ‘ *and to keep back nothing that is profitable*  
 ‘ *for you, Acts xx. 27, 20.* And sure no-  
 ‘ thing can be more profitable for you,  
 ‘ than to teach you where, how, and  
 ‘ from whom you are to receive *Remission*  
 ‘ of your Sins. Here I declar’d, that I  
 entirely agreed with Dr. B. that no Do-  
 ctine could be more profitable, or of greater  
 Importance, than his Doctrine, if true.  
 And I declar’d farther, That it became  
 the Clergy, (who could not but know  
 what Powers or Authority they had com-  
 mitted to them) freely and explicitly to  
 declare what were their Powers ; and  
 as explicitly to disclaim and utterly re-  
 nounce what did not belong to them, re-  
 lating to a Matter of so great Concern to  
 all Christians, as the *Remission* of their Sins  
 most certainly is.

Having made these Observations, I be-  
 gan to read the Heads and *main Assertions*  
 of the Sermon, not indeed without ma-  
 king farther Observations, as I went on ;  
 but without any of those Expressions of  
 Wit, which the Author of the Letter has  
 been

been pleased to make me use. I made no Jest or Sarcafms on the Church of *Rome*, or her Priests. I spake of no *Precious Somethings*, no *Useful Knack*, no *Political Engine*, no *Popish Tricking*, no *Pick-lock*, no *Mumpsimus*. I never said, nor so much as intimated, that the Doctor had carried the Point of *Absolution* beyond what he had Ground for from the Words of our Church. Nor was it in Opposition to me, that one who is no inconsiderable Member, said what is mentioned, *p. 22*. That as to the *Powers* of the Church and Clergy in the *Absolution* of Sinners, Dr. *B.* had carried that Doctrin no higher, than the Liturgy and other Acts of the Church had done. I cannot say he us'd those very Words, or Words of quite the same Import ; but I took particular Notice of them, as being very remarkable, and I think his Words were not much short of those I have transcribed from the Letter.

I express'd no doubt of Dr. *B.*'s printing his Sermon exactly as he preach'd it : I did not express my self so improperly as to say, The *Remission* of Sins by God alone was *declared* to the People in *Deprecatory* Words. Nor did I mention Dr. *Nichols*, having indeed never look'd into his Book.

It



It would tire the Reader, if I should set right all the Misrepresentations of the Letter-Writer, who, I am perswaded, had no ill Intention in writing and publishing it. But if he was a Member then present in the House, is it not strange, that one, who had this Matter so much at Heart, should not speak on the Occasion in the House? nor acquaint those, who did speak with his writing.

To proceed now to give the main of what I said, as far as I can recover it, by the Help of the Marks I had made in the Margin of the printed Sermon, which I produced in the House; and those I made in the Letter, presently after it was published.

I first read the three Heads of the Doctor's Discourse: ' 1. That our Saviour  
' did leave with his Apostles a Power to  
' remit or retain Sins.

' 2. That this Power was transmitted  
' by them to their Successors, and conti-  
' nues in the Church to this Day.

' 3. How useful and expedient it is, that  
' there should be such a Power in the  
' Church; and the great Benefit it may  
' be to the People, if rightly used and  
' applied.

I observed, that in the very beginning of his Discourse on the 1<sup>st</sup> Head, he took care to explain what was meant by the *Power*, left with the Apostles, *to remit or retain Sins*; 'That is, says he, to pardon 'or forgive Sins, or else to bind them more 'closely, so as the Sinner should not be released from his Sin, or pardoned by God, 'till they had released him also. And, that soon after he thus explains our Lord's Words to the Apostles; *John 20. 21. As my Father hath sent me, so send I you.* 'The 'same Power which my Father has committed to me, the same do I now confer 'upon you. I observ'd, that he rightly explains the Words, *ver. 22. He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.* 'Whereby, says the Doctor, He furnished them with Ability, 'or Capacity, to execute that Power and 'Authority, which he had given them. Where I took notice in how few Words he dispatched this great Point in the first part of his Sermon: And that, when he comes to enlarge on the other Heads, and labours to shew, *That the Bishops and their Presbyters have now the same Power the Apostles had; and the Usefulness of that same Power,* He says not one word of the Clergy's having now also the same Ability

or Capacity to execute that Power; whereas I thought the *same Power* required the *same Capacity*, and that it must be supposed, they are convey'd together, or, that neither of them is convey'd at all. I read from p. 16. the following Words: ' That  
 ' his Church might not suffer in his Ab-  
 ' fence for want of Pastors and Governors  
 ' to take care of it, he committed all his  
 ' Power and Authority, as Head of the  
 ' Church, to his Apostles. This the Text  
 ' expressly shews, *as my Father sent me,*  
 ' says Christ, *so send I you.* As if he had  
 ' said, With the same Power and Authori-  
 ' ty that my Father sent me into the  
 ' World to constitute and govern my  
 ' Church, I send you and your Successors,  
 ' &c. I find some more Passages marked  
 by me in the Printed Sermon, under the  
 first Head, which I can't say I read to the  
 House.

P. 24. The Doctor comes to his 2d Head, to shew, that *the Apostles were to have Successors in this, as well as the other Parts of their Office.* Hence I read the Words following: ' If Bishops and their Presby-  
 ' ters, the Successors of the Apostles, have  
 ' a Right to pardon Sins, by the *Ministra-*  
 ' *tion of the Word and Sacraments*; they  
 ' must have a Right to *pardon* them by  
 ' Ab-

( 11 )

‘ *Absolution*, and to *retain* them also by  
‘ *Excommunication*, and other spiritual Cen-  
‘ *sures*, as the Apostles had; and their  
‘ *Censures* also are ratified in Heaven, as  
‘ those of the Apostles were, so that no  
‘ Power on Earth can release them, but  
‘ only he that bound them. I also ob-  
‘ serv’d, that having given the Detail of  
‘ the Story of *Ambrose* and *Theodosius* the  
‘ Great, the one an Archbishop, and the  
‘ other an Emperor, he concludes, ‘ That  
‘ this Act was agreeable to the present Do-  
‘ ctine of our Church, and consequently,  
‘ that our Bishops have the Authority  
‘ which *St. Ambrose* exercis’d, and by the  
‘ Law of God may execute it when there  
‘ is just Occasion, even upon the *Greatest*;  
‘ there being no Person on Earth so great,  
‘ as to be exempted from this Power, p. 31.  
Here I did Dr. B. the Justice to read what  
he quoted from the *Ordination* Service and  
the *Visitation of the Sick*, to shew, that  
his Doctrine was no *Popish* Doctrine. And  
I observ’d to the House, that two of the  
Ablest *Popish* Writers on the Sacrament of  
Penance, *Morinus* and *Martene*, freely  
own’d, that the Priests adding the *Autho-*  
*ritative* Words, *I absolve thee*, &c. to the  
*Precatory Part*, in the Form of *Absolution*,  
began to be in use in the Church in the

13<sup>th</sup> Century. Tho' the Doctor had taken occasion, p. 20. to slide in this notable Assertion; 'When Men fell into Sin after Baptism, they [the Apostles] then *authoritatively* pronounced the *Remission* of Sins, to such as they found penitent, saying, *I forgive, or absolve, thee from thy Sins in the Person of Christ*; or to that effect. 'Tis not hard to guess with what particular View he made this Assertion, nor what Texts of Scripture he must produce to support it, tho' he refers to none, and had rather, I fancy, not be call'd on to shew any.

From his Discourse on the last Head, concerning the Usefulness of the Power, I only read this Passage, p. 39. 'And if upon Examination of your Consciences, you find your selves guilty of particular Sins, which may require a particular Repentance, you ought then to go to the Priest in private, and make a particular *Confession*, and desire a particular *Absolution*; And his Reference to the *Exhortation* to the Holy Communion. With respect to this Passage, I observ'd to the House, that Dr. B. had published an Advertisement before another of his Sermons; *Of the Honour of the Christian Priesthood: To set it in the true Light.*

' By

' By which Words, says he, I under-  
 ' stand some Persons think I would intro-  
 ' duce *Auricular Confession*, which I am  
 ' sure was ever very far from my Thoughts:  
 ' For I meant no more by *particular Sins*  
 ' which might need a *particular Repentance*,  
 ' than such Sins as *ought* to burden a Man's  
 ' Conscience to that Degree, that he can-  
 ' not quiet it without further Comfort or  
 ' Counsel, as it is expressed in the *Exhorta-*  
 ' *tion to the Holy Communion*, to which I  
 ' there refer the Reader. And I should  
 ' have printed that Passage in the very  
 ' Words of that Exhortation, had I not  
 ' been obliged to print it as I preach'd it.

And here I could not but observe a want  
 of Ingenuity, in drawing in the Reader  
 to conclude, that at least in the *Advertise-*  
*ment* he had express'd himself according to  
 the Sense of the Church in its *Exhortation*,  
 wherein the People are not moved to apply  
 to the Priest on account of the Heinous-  
 ness of their Sins, (for even Blasphemy and  
 Adultery being confess'd to God, and re-  
 pent'd of, are there supposed to be par-  
 don'd by God) but solely, *in case any one*  
*cannot quiet his Conscience*. Whereas the  
 Doctor supposes some Sins *ought so to bur-*  
*den a Man's Conscience, &c.*

I would now further observe, that if this Doctrine once prevails, that some particular Sins *ought* to be privately confess'd to a Priest, and his *Absolution* desir'd, the Obligation might soon be extended to Sins in general, and what even Dr. *Brett* allows to be *Popish*, *Auricular Confession*, might soon be required by an Ecclesiastical Law, of the People of this Land.

I declar'd at the same time, that I apprehended the only Reason, why our first *Reformers* left the *Authoritative* Form of *Absolution* in the Liturgy, was, the hope of bringing many superstitious Persons to conform, who would have adhered to the discarded *Popish* Priests, if those of the Established Church had been destitute of Power *so* to *Absolve*. That this their Hope was answer'd by the Conformity of many *Romanists* for a time: And therefore the Method then taken may be thought to have been Prudent.

This was the most I could say in Excuse of what our first *Reformers* did in this matter. For I had seen, and consider'd, and knew not how to answer a *Query* laid before King *Henry* the 8<sup>th</sup>, by Archbishop *Cranmer*, in the Year 1536. in the following Words: ' If the Clergy know that  
' the common sort of Men have them in a  
' higher

‘higher Estimation, because they are per-  
 ‘swaded, that it lyeth in the Will and  
 ‘Power of Priests to remit or not remit  
 ‘Sins at their pleasure, Whether in such  
 ‘case the said Clergy offend, if they wink  
 ‘at this, and voluntarily suffer the People  
 ‘to continue in this Opinion?

I concluded with a Motion, that the Sermon might be referr’d to a Committee, to examine it, and report their Opinion of the Doctrine deliver’d in it, to the House; declaring, That, as I had no Knowledge of, so I had not the least ill Will to Dr. *Brett*.

After this, in Reply to something said by a Reverend Member, for whom I often in Convocation have expressed a very particular Respect, I spoke a second time to this effect; That it was not my Aim to pick out the most offensive Passages; but to read the *main Assertions* in the Sermon, and offer them to the Consideration of the House. That asserting to a Priest the same Authority to forgive Sins, as our Blessed Lord had, as Head of the Church, or the same, as He exercis’d here on Earth, a Power to bind Sins, so as the Sinner should not be released from his Sin, or pardoned by God till the Priest, or his Bishop, or the College of Bishops, had re-  
 released



leased him, could not but be very *shocking* to me, how *agreeable* soever it might be to *others*. That however, I was no way concern'd, that the House should directly take the Sermon into Consideration, provided They would make it the Occasion of doing what they could to prevent the spreading of pernicious Errors in a matter of so great Concern to all Christians, as that of *Remission* of Sins, by declaring what was the true Christian Doctrine, of which the Clergy of the Church of *England* could not be Ignorant. That I could not but differ intirely from what had been said, from the other side of the House, That it became Us *rather* to take notice of those who deprest'd the Authority of the *Church* and *Clergy*, particularly, the Author of *the Rights of the Church*, &c. I being clear in Opinion to the contrary; That it more became such an Assembly as we were; was more for our Honour and our Interest; tended more to the Promoting true Religion, and all the good Ends for which we were Assembled, to take notice of, and labour to remove the just Offence given by Persons of our own Order, in superstitiously straining the *Authority* of the Clergy too high; than to meddle with those of the Laity, who attempted in their  
Wri-

Writings to lessen the Clergy's *Authority*, or prejudice their *Rights*.

I said nothing of Offences given, or of ill Books written, by Clergy-men, nor did I say any thing else of what is transcribed from the Letter into the 36th Page of the 2d Part of *the Nation vindicated*, &c. Yet am willing on this occasion to declare, that I never gave Assent or Approbation to that *Representation of the present State of Religion*, &c. which came from the Committee of both Houses of Convocation. When I have told the Reader I said nothing of *Reverence due to the Chair*, I have no more to say with relation to what passed in the Lower House of Convocation, *Feb. 22*. Only, I desire it may be observed, that in disclaiming my having said, or intimated, as if Dr. B. had carried the Point of Absolution beyond what he had ground for from the Words of our Church, I meant only the first time I spoke.

But a Fortnight after, when I had read the Letter about this Motion, not discourag'd by the Misrepresentation of what I had said, from laying hold of the first Opportunity which might offer, I resolv'd to make in few Words a 2d Motion, with the same View I had in making the first; and Friday, *March the 7th*, finding the House again in a state of Silence, and unemploy'd,

employ'd, I spoke to this Effect:

That I hoped the Members had consider'd what was formerly said on occasion of Dr. *Brett's* Sermon of *Remission of Sins*, and were prepar'd to do what was proper to remove the Offence and Inconvenience, which had risen from the Preaching and Publishing it: That I would but just mention the main Grounds of what I had to move, and then make the Motion. Here I repeated, as well as I could, out of the Form of *Ordering of Priests*, the *Rubric* immediately foregoing, and the main Words used by the Bishop in the very Act of *Ordaining*; thus: 'The Bishop, 'with the Priests present, shall lay their 'Hands severally upon the Head of every 'one that receiveth the Order of Priest- 'hood,—the Bishop saying, *Receive the 'Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a 'Priest in the Church of God, now commit- 'ted unto thee by the Imposition of our Hands. 'Whose Sins thou dost forgive, they are 'forgiven; and whose Sins thou dost retain, 'they are retained.* I also repeated out of the Form of *Absolution* in the *Visitation of the Sick*, these Words; *By his [i. e. our Lord Jesus Christ] Authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy Sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* Then I said; The Use of  
the

the Words; *Receive the Holy Ghost*: and of the Words; *Whose Sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven, and whose Sins thou dost retain, they are retained*, in Ordaining a Priest; and also the Use of Words, like to those I had read to them in *absolving* Sins, began, in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, whereas all the erroneous Doctrines and Practices which our Church condemns in the Church of *Rome* had prevail'd before that time. I also touch'd on the Reason why I conceiv'd our first *Reformers* retain'd the Use of the latter part of the Form of *Absolution* in the Visitation of the Sick, and of the Words, *Receive the Holy Ghost, &c.* in Ordaining Priests; the same in effect I gave *Feb. 22d.*

Then I concluded with a Motion, That the House would do what might be thought proper to obtain a Publick Declaration, from the whole Synod, to explain and determin the Sense of both Forms. My Motion was seconded. No one directly oppos'd it. But a way was found to avoid putting the Question in order to know the Sense of the House, this day, as well as the former; of which, tho' I was immediately aware, yet I did not think fit to press the putting the Question, because I saw the House dispos'd to decline it.

Having thus given an Account of the Motions I made, I am now to lay down more distinctly the main Grounds of them.

When I made the first, I had observ'd, that Dr. Comber in his *Companion to the Temple*, Part 4. p. 128. having affirm'd, That the Form [of *Absolution* in the Visitation of the Sick] it self is *very antient*, consisting now, as it did of old, of two Parts, the first Deprecative, the second Indicative; the one *intreating* for Pardon, the other *dispensing* it, produces one single Authority in Support of his Assertion; *Alex. Hales*, a Schoolman, who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, and who speaks only of what was practis'd in his own time. And I had ready to produce for the Satisfaction of the House, the Testimonies of *Morinus* and *Martene*, as I here set them down; adding that of *Goar*, which I saw soon after. I would also refer the Reader to *Daille's* Treatise *de Sacramentali sive Auriculari Latinorum Confessione*, particularly to the 40<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>d</sup> Chapters of his 4<sup>th</sup> Book.

Before I made the 2<sup>d</sup> Motion, I had collected the Testimonies of the two first relating to the Words used in Ordaining Priests, which I now also give. *Morin. de Sacramento Pœnitentiæ, lib. 8. cap. 8. Formulam ordinariam Absolutionis, sive reconciliationis*

*conciliationis Pœnitentium, fuisse Deprecatoriam, testantur quotquot hæcenus legi, aut relata audiui, antiquitatis Ecclesiasticæ monumenta, ad annum salutis 200 supra 1000. In Ritualibus antiquis prope omnibus explicantur ritus Visitationis & Confessionis infirmorum; & separatim eorum qui proximi sunt morti. Sed in utroque Ritu omnia, quæ ad reconciliationem pertinent, deprecatoria sunt.— Verum post seculum 12 legere capi quosdam Doctores docentes Indicativum modum Deprecatorio subjungendum esse; cum autem in illis initiis omnes deprecatoriâ uterentur formulâ, paucos quosdam homines obtinere & repugnare, nec erat prudentiæ, nec tutum; ideo deprecatoriâ indicativam addere satis illis fuit. Paucis annis ita invaluit hæc sententia, ut vulgatum esset apud Doctores, utrumque modum esse conjungendum. Tandem à nonnullis definitum est Deprecatoriam illam formulam ad substantialem Absolutionis formam nihil pertinere, sed solam Indicativam. Quo factum, ut omnes ordinariis Precibus formulam adderent Indicativam, ne saltem Sacramentum dubium conferrent, quod ante Annum Christi 1300 non obtinuit. Inveterascente autem istâ consuetudine, Doctores celebres & multi definirunt, Absolutionem deprecativo modo datam non valere: Meâ quidem sententiâ rectè. Thus Morinus, as a good Catholick, who wrote*

wrote 50 Years ago. See the whole Chapter, with the 4 following ones, 9, 10, 11, 12. The Sum of the 12th Chapter is, *Græci hæctenus in Absolutione à peccatis nullâ aliâ formulâ usi sunt quam deprecativâ, &c.* Martene, de Antiquis Ecclesiæ Ritibus, Libri quatuor. Rotomagi. 1700. l. 1. P. 2. c. 6. Art. 5. n. 12. p. 33, 34. *Absolutionis formulam, indicant sancti Patres, non indicativam, sed deprecativam prorsus extitisse; eam precis aut orationis nomine vulgo indigittantes. — Unde S Radulfus Ardens, qui seculo 12 florebat. — Non dicimus, inquit, Ego dimitto tibi peccata tua; sed dicimus orando, misereatur tui omnipotens Deus. Simili fere modo loquitur Gulielmus Parisiensis, c. 19. de Sacramento Pœnitentiæ: Neque more judicum forinsecorum pronunciat Confessor absolvimus te; non condemnamus, sed orationem faciat super eum, ut Deus absolutionem S remissionem atq; gratiam sanctificationis tribuat, &c. His consonant omnes antiqui libri Rituales MSS. utriusque Ecclesiæ, in quibus variæ piæq; orationes ad reconciliandos pœnitentes descriptæ leguntur. — Ceterum forma deprecatoria post medium seculum 13 desinere cæpit. — Deniq; tantos progressus brevi fecit forma absoluta, ut de deprecativæ validitate circa eadem tempora dubitari cæperit,*

Goar *Rituale Græcorum*. Par. 1647. p. 676. *Equidem, si ex Ecclesiasticâ Historiâ, ritualibus antiquis, traditione, aut aliis non excipientis testimoniis conicere licet, antiquam, in Ecclesiâ Latinâ Pœnitentiæ Sacramenti sive Absolutionis formam deprecativis verbis compositam fuisse; eamq; indicativam & judicativam, ut ita loquar, quâ nunc utimur, Absolvo te a peccatis tuis; quatuor circiter seculorum etatem forsan non superare, nec ullatenus in Sacramentariis reperiri, aut ab antiquioribus scriptoribus referri; proindeq; recentius, æquo tamen rationum pondere, motam Ecclesiam illam, ut communem, & ab omnibus recipendam induxisse, plures jam sunt, qui liberrime asserunt, tenaciter propugnant, clare docent, & feliciter scribunt.*

With relation to the use of the Words, *Receive the Holy Ghost, &c.* in ordaining Priests, *Morinus de Sacris Ordin. P. 3. Ex. 7. C. 2. Tota illa ceremonia, & secundum materiam, & secundum formam mille ducentis annis incognita fuit in Ecclesiâ Dei: Nulli rituales ante hoc tempus illius meminerunt, licet copiosi sint, & singulos ritus pauci momenti describant. Imò nonnulli sunt eo tempore longe recentiores, & diffusi admodum, qui illam prætereunt. In codice Rhemensi, qui est annorum circiter 400 habetur*



betur illa formula, sed in margine addita, caractere tamen ad textus antiquitatem accedente.—Autores quoq; qui ante quingentos annos de his scribebant, nullam istius manus impositionis mentionem faciunt, & ita sermonem suum distribuunt, ut nullibi in ritu Ordinationis illis cognito locum habere possit.

Martene, Art. 9. n. 12. p. 316. xii. Præter hanc manus impositionem, aliam describit editum Pontificale Romanum ab Episcopo faciendam hæc proferente verba : [Accipite Spiritum Sanctum, quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis; & quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt.]— Verum antiqui ordinationum Ritus nullam prorsus illius mentionem faciunt; nullam Pontificale Egberti, Anglicanum monasterii Gemmeticensis, antiqua Sacramentaria, Regium, Remense, Noviomense, Gellonense annorum 900. Caturcense, Turonense, Noviomense Radbodi Pontificale annorum 800. Suseffionense 700. Lugdunense, Salisburgense, Bisuntinum, Noviomense tertium annorum 600. Remense S. Remigii duplex, Camera-cense, Apamiense, Constantinopolitanum, annorum 500. Moguntinum duplex, Romanum duplex, & Aquense, annorum 400.— Quibus addas antiquos scriptores omnes, eos præsertim qui ecclesiasticos ritus referendos enucleandosq; in se susceperunt, Isidorum, Ama-

*Amalarium, Rabanum, Micrologum, Ivonem Carnotensem, Hugonem Victorinum, aliosq; non paucos, apud quos altum ubiq; de hac manuum impositione silentium.*

In the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century, at the same *Lateran Council*, which first declared *Transubstantiation*, held under Pope *Innocent III.* A. D. 1215. *Private Confessing* of Sins to a Priest, at least once in the Year, was also first required of all, who were of Years of Discretion.

Toward the latter end of that Age, in a great National Council held at *London*, under *Othobon*, the Pope's Legate, A. D. 1268. it was ordered, That all Confessors should absolve *Confitentes*, in the Form of Words following; *Ego te a peccatis tuis, auctoritate quâ fungor, absolvo.*

I find no Ecclesiastical Law or Canon, in the Thirteenth or Fourteenth Century, directing the Use of the Words, *Receive the Holy Ghost, &c.* in ordaining a Priest; but the Use of them did by degrees obtain in the Course of that time, and the Words were inserted in the Rituals or Pontificals of the Church of *Rome*, before the Council of *Trent*.

By that Council, Sess. 14. c. 6. we are Nov. 25. taught: *Sacerdotes, qui peccato mortali te-*<sup>1551.</sup>

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nentur,

ncntur, per virtutem Spiritus sancti in ordinatione collatam, tamquam Christi ministros, functionem remittendi peccata exercere; eosq; pravè sentire, qui in malis sacerdotibus hanc potestatem non esse contendunt. Quamvis autem Absolutio Sacerdotis alieni beneficii sit dispensatio, tamen non est solum nudum ministerium, vel annunciandi Evangelium, vel declarandi remissa esse peccata; sed ad instar actus judicialis, quo ab ipso, velut a iudice, sententia pronuntiatur.

Suitable to this their Doctrine are their Canons. *Can. 3.* runs thus: *Si quis dixerit, verba illa Domini Salvatoris, Accipite Spiritum Sanctum; quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis; & quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt: non esse intelligenda de potestate remittendi & retinendi peccata in Sacramento Pœnitentiæ, sicut Ecclesia Catholica ab initio semper intellexit; detorsit autem, contra institutionem hujus Sacramenti, ad auctoritatem prædicandi Evangelium; anathema sit.* See also *Can. 9, 10, 15.*

*Jul. 15.*  
*1563.*

*Sess. 23. De Sacramento Ordinis, c. 1.* this is laid down for the true and Catholick Doctrine: *Sacerdotium à Domino Salvatore nostro institutum esse, atq; Apostolis, eorumq; successoribus in sacerdotio, potestatem traditam consecrandi, offerendi, & ministrandi Corpus*

*Corpus & Sanguinem ejus, necnon & peccata dimittendi, & retinendi, sacrae literæ ostendunt, & Catholica Ecclesie traditio semper docuit.* Their first Canon is suited to this Doctrine; and the 4th runs thus: *Si quis dixerit, per sacram ordinationem non dari Spiritum sanctum; ac proinde frustra Episcopos dicere: Accipe Spiritum sanctum; aut per eam non imprimi characterem; vel eum, qui sacerdos semel fuerit, laicum rursus fieri posse; anathema sit.*

In the Catechism for the Parochial Clergy, put out by virtue of a Decree of this Council, in Part the 2d. which is *de Sacramentis*, under the Title *de Pœnitentiæ Sacramento*, n. 19. the Words, *Ego te absolvo*, are declar'd to be evidently the perfect Form. And, n. 20. the Prayers which accompany it are said to be *non quidem ad formam necessariæ, sed ut ea removeantur, quæ Sacramenti vim, & efficientiam, illius culpâ, cui administratur, impedire possent. Quamobrem peccatores Deo ingentes gratias agant, qui tam amplam potestatem in Ecclesiâ sacerdotibus tribuerit.* Accordingly under the Title, *de Ordinis Sacramento*, n. 50. where the Consecration of the Priest is explain'd, it is set forth, that at last the Bishop, with the Priests who are present, laying Hands on him who receiveth the

Order of Priesthood, saith, *Accipe Spiritum sanctum, quorum, &c. ei; caelestem illam, quam Dominus Discipulis suis dedit, peccata retinendi, ac remittendi potestatem tribuit.*

I observe, First, That when in the beginning of the Thirteenth Age, Private Confession to the Priest was first imposed in the Council of *Lateran*, it was not thought advisable to require it directly, in order to obtain the Absolution of the Priest, who is chiefly consider'd as a Spiritual Physician by that Council; nor is any Form of Absolving intimated there.

I observe, Secondly, That the Form, *Ego te absolvo*, was probably first introduced into Ecclesiastical Courts, to take off some disabling Sentence before pass'd by an Ecclesiastical Judge.

This Observation is but conjectural; for it appears, that although the Sentence of *Excommunication* was *Judicial*, and pronounced accordingly, yet the *Absolution* from that Sentence, even in the time of *Innocent III.* was given in Deprecatory Words; and, perhaps, for this Reason, because the Absolved Person was supposed to have the Pardon of God, when he had that of the Church; but it was certainly more natural to use *Judiciary* Words, when

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an Ecclesiastical Judge was to *take off* what he had laid on by such Words. *Morinus* was not able to clear the Practice; but he argues rightly when he says, *Ch. 21. n. 4. Formula deprecativa Absolutioni Sacramentali aptius conveniet quàm Absolutioni ab Excommunicatione.* See that whole Chapter.

I observe, Thirdly, That for some time after the *Lateran* Council, all Pretension to the use of Authoritative Words was generally disclaim'd by Confessors, or to do any thing more, than pray to God, That he would give to the Penitent Absolution, and his sanctifying Grace.

I observe, Fourthly, That though for so many Ages no Man had offer'd to do any thing, that look'd like authoritatively loosing the Bands of Sin; yet when some Confessors had ventur'd to add the Authoritative Form of Words to their Prayer for God's Pardon to the penitent Sinner, the Innovation soon spread, and, like a Torrent, bore down all Opposition. The new Form first had its Sanction from a **Pope's** Legat, with a Council under him, **in this** City. And it was found to answer **Purposes** so well, that the main Words of it were by *private Writers first*, and after by *Authority* of the Council of *Trent*, declar'd to be the only essential ones. I ob-

I observe, Fifthly, That the Use of the Words, *Receive the Holy Ghost, &c.* in ordaining Priests, took much the same Course, and for the same Reason, though the Council of *Trent* was the first Council that declar'd them essential to the Ordination of a Priest.

These, and such like Considerations, were the first and main Ground of the Motions I made in the Lower House of Convocation.

The other Ground was, the Consideration of the Reason, which, as I apprehended, satisfied our first Reformers, in leaving Place to the two Forms in their Liturgy.

It's well known, That in the Reign of King *Edward VI.* within the Compass of 3 Years, two Books of Common-Prayer, &c. were put out by publick Authority.

With the first, which was publish'd, *A. D.* 1549. no Form of *Ordaining* was provided; so that therein we have only to look into the *Communion Service*, and the *Visitation of the Sick*. And after having several times consider'd what is there to be found relating to Absolution, I am persuaded, That although the Church therein required the Priest to make use of the  
Form

Form of Absolution, which was then placed in the *Visitation of the Sick*, (and it continues the very same to this Day) in all *private Confessions*, particularly, such as were made before coming to the Holy Communion; yet it was order'd to be used purely for the satisfying *scrupulous* Minds; and that the Sense of those who framed that Book, in the *Exhortation* appointed to be used by the Parish-Priest, when the People were negligent to come to the Communion, is sufficiently declared to be, That the Absolution of a Priest is of no avail toward the Pardon of Sin.

In the first part of the Exhortation it is declared, That, as we have obteigned Remission of our Sinnes, and are made Partakers of the Kyngdom of Heaven, by the Passion of Christ, so we are assured thereof, yf we come to the Sacrament with heartie *Repentaunce* for our Offences, stedfast Faith in Goddes Mercye, and earnest Minde to obeye Goddes Will, and to offend no more. Soon after, the Waies and Meanes to be found worthy Partakers, are declar'd to be, first, that we be truly repentaunt of our former evyll Lyfe, and that we *confesse* with an unfained Heart to *almightie God*, our Sinnes towardes his Majestie committed: and that with inward Sorrow we  
bewaile



bewaile our Offences, and *require of almightie God, Mercie and Pardon*, promising to him the Amendment of our former Lyfe. Then, that we be reconciled to, and in charitie with all the Worlde. Lastly, that we make Satisfaction and due Restitution to those we have wronged, or at least be in full mind and purpose so to do, as soon as we are able, or els not come to the holy Table, thinking to deceive God, who seeth all Mennes Heartes: For neyther the Absolution of the Priest can any thing availe us, nor the receiving of this holy Sacrament doth any thing but increase our Damnation.

We have now seen all the Waies and Meanes of becoming *worthy Receivers* of this Holy Sacrament, *whereby* we are *asserteigned* that we have *obteigned Remission of our Sinnes*; and neither the *Absolution of a Priest*, nor *Confession of Sins to a Priest*, is to be found among them. Therefore our first Reformers thought neither of them of any Availe toward the Pardon of Sin.

*What follows*, is purely in order to *satisfy scrupulous Mindes*. See it in P. S.

In the Rubric, before the Absolution, in the Visitation of the Sick, it was order'd, That the same Form of Absolution should be used in all *private Confessions*; but

but that Order was left out in the 2d Book; and so were all those Passages in the Exhortation before the Holy Communion, which mention *any confessing* of Sins to a Priest, or indeed suppose any *sacerdotal Absolution*: So that throughout the whole Book there is *no mention* any where of *confessing Sins to a Priest*; nor of the *Priest's Absolving*, except once in the Visitation of the Sick.

In the small Book of Homilies published by Authority in the Reign of K. Edward, there is little to be found that may help us to discern the Sense of our first Reformers, concerning Confession to a Priest; but, in the Book published in Q. Elizabeth's Time, we have *An Homily of Repentance, and of true Reconciliation unto God*: In the 2d Part of which, Repentance is declared to consist of four Parts. Contrition of the Heart. An unfeigned Confession of our Sins unto God. Faith. Amendment of Life. What is set forth under the 2d Head, discovers the Sense of our Church in those Days, and deserves to be read. I'll transcribe only the most material Words: " Being therefore not led  
 " with the Conscience thereof [of Auricu-  
 " lar Confession] let us with Fear and  
 " Trembling, and with a true contrite  
 " Heart, use that kind of Confession that  
 E " God

“ *God doth command in his Word, and then,*  
 “ *doubtless, as He is faithful and righte-*  
 “ *ous, He will forgive us our Sins, and*  
 “ *make us clean from all Wickedness. I*  
 “ *do not say, but that if any do find them-*  
 “ *selves troubled in Conscience, they may*  
 “ *repair to their learned Curate or Pastor,*  
 “ *or to some other godly learned Man, and*  
 “ *shew the Trouble and Doubt of their Con-*  
 “ *science to them, that they may receive at*  
 “ *their hand the comfortable Salve of God’s*  
 “ *Word.*

As I take it, such Persons, as *find them-*  
*selves troubled,* may *shew the Trouble and*  
*Doubt of their Conscience,* or, as cannot by o-  
 ther Means quiet their own Conscience, but  
 require further Comfort or Counsel, may o-  
 pen their Grief to a discreet and learned  
 Minister of God’s Word, without confessing  
 to that Minister the Sins, which were the  
 Cause of their Grief and Trouble.

And a discreet Parish Priest may, by the  
 right Application of God’s Word, admini-  
 ster not only Comfort, but the Benefit of Ab-  
 solution also, without using any authorita-  
 tive Form of Absolving, to such as come  
 and open their Grief to him for Comfort or  
 Counsel: Or to use the Words, as they  
 stand in our present Exhortation, *The Be-*  
*nefit of Absolution together with ghostly*  
*Counsel and Advice.* Such

Such a Minister may from the Word of God assure and satisfy the Penitent, that he certainly has the *Benefit of God's Absolution*; and that this was the Intention of the Compilers of this 2d Book, I am the more satisfied, by observing, That in this very Book they first prescrib'd a Way and Form of doing it. For whereas in the first Book the Morning and Evening Prayers began with the Lord's Prayer; in the 2d, before that Prayer, first a Sentence of Scripture was order'd to be read; next an Exhortation to Confession of Sins before God, then a general Confession. After which, the *Absolution*, as it is call'd, *was to be pronounced by the Minister alone*; which is to declare to the People from God's Word, That he desires the Conversion and eternal Happiness of a Sinner; that as *he* pardoneth and absolveth all true Penitents, who believe his Gospel, so he has given Power and Commandment to his *Ministers*, to declare and pronounce to them the *Absolution* and Remission of their Sins.

In the same Book, the Rubric, in the Visitation of the Sick, by making a *special Confession if he feel his Conscience troubled with any weighty Matter*, seems to require the confessing the particular Sin that troubles;

bles; yet even here is nothing of *private* or *auricular* Confession. The *general* Confessions in other Parts of this Book, are certainly directed to be made only to *Almighty God*; whereas in the first Book, tho' the Repentance was to Almighty God only, yet the Confession in the Communion-Service (and there was no other general one in that Book) was made to be to Almighty God, and to *his holy Church*. Those are called *general* Confessions, this is called a *special* Confession; and I profess I cannot discern Reason enough for thinking that *this* was intended to be made to any other than Almighty God; or that more was meant than this: If the sick was troubled in Mind, on account of any great Sin or Sins, he should *then* make a special Confession to God, &c. Weighty Sins will be allow'd to require a particular Confession, and the Monition to be seasonable.

The Form and Manner of making and consecrating Bishops, Priests and Deacons, was first published with the 2d Book of Common Prayer, *A. D.* 1552.

In *ordaining* the Priest, the Words *Receive the holy Ghost* were retained as before in the *Romish* Pontifical.

They still continue with these Words inserted after *Holy Ghost*: *for the Office and*  
*Work*

*Work of a Priest, in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our Hands.*

I shall only observe, that the Words, *Whose Sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven; and whose Sins thou dost retain, they are retained;* stand as if they were *thought essential* Words, as they are *declared* to be by the Church of Rome. Yet in all the foregoing Parts of the Office, even where the whole Duty of the Priest seems to be declared, no mention is made of forgiving, or of retaining Men's Sins.

Before I conclude, I humbly ask this Question.

If there be not good Reason why a publick Declaration should be made by the Bishops and Clergy, to *remove* the *Offence* taken by some at the very scandalous Doctrine of late industriously taught concerning Remission of Sin; to prevent its getting into the Minds of such well disposed and religious, but weak Persons, as are yet clear of the Infection; and to root out of the Minds of others that Superstition which moves them to believe, That a Christian Priest has Authority to absolve Men from their Sins, and, in consequence of that Belief, to apply to a Priest, in order to obtain by private Confession of their Sins to him,  
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an authoritative Absolution from him?

I am not minded to write Books of Controversy: but having consider'd all the Passages in the New Testament, which set forth, or have respect to the Christian Doctrine concerning Remission of Sins, I freely declare my Opinion, That *no Christian Priest has Authority to absolve any one from his Sins.* That for a Priest to pretend to such Authority is great Presumption: And that to think, such authoritative Absolution is of the least Efficacy for the Pardon of Sin, is gross Superstition.

I shall be ready, when call'd on, farther to explain and support these *Assertions*, which are now delivered, without Ambiguity, in the properest Words I could think of. I only desire, that whoever finds himself dispos'd to *censure*, would first well consider and *examine*, and then be *clear* and *explicit* in what he thinks fit to *assert* himself.

Apr. 16. 1712.

R. CANNON.

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POST-

## POSTSCRIPT.

*The latter part of the Exhortation in the Communion-Service, which is briefly consider'd in the foregoing Papers, as it was*

*In the first Book of Common Prayer, A. D. 1549.*

**A**ND yf there bee any of you, whose Conscience is troubled and greved in any thing, lackyng Comforte or Counsaill, let him come to me, or to some other discrete and learned Priest, taught in the Law of God, and confess and open his Sinne and Grief secretly, that he maie receive such Ghostly Counsaill, Advise, and Comfort, that his Conscience may be releved, and that of us (as of the Ministers of God, and of the Church) he may receive Comforte and Absolution, to the Satisfaction of his Mind, and avoiding all Scruple and Doubtfulness: [Requiring suche as shall be satisfied with a generall Confession, not to be offended with them that do use, to their further satisfying the auricular and secrete Confession to the Prieste: nor those also which think needful or convenient



venient for the Quietness of their own Consciences, particularly to *open their Sins* to the Priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble Confession to God, and the generall Confession to the Church. But in all things to follow and kepe the Rule of Charitie, and every Man to be satisfied with his own Conscience, not judging other Mennes Mindes or Consciences: whereas he hath no Warrant of Goddes Word to the same.]

*N. B.* All within Hooks is omitted in the second Book, which reduced the Exhortation in a manner to what it now is; only a new Clause was inserted, in 1661. immediately before what I have transcribed from the 2d Book, *viz. Therefore if any, &c.*

*In the Second Book, 1552.*

**A**ND because it is requisite that no Man should come to the Holy Communion but with a full Trust in God's Mercy, and with a quiet Conscience: therefore if there be any of you which by the meanes aforesayd, cannot quiet his own Conscience, but requireth further Comfort or Counsel: Then let him come to me, or some other discrete or  
learned

learned *Minister of God's Word*, and open his Griefe, that he may receive such *Godly Counsaile, Advise, and Coumfort*, as his Conscience may be releived, and that *by the Ministeri of God's Word*, he may receive *Comfort*, and the *Benefite of Absolution* to the quieting of his Conscience, and avoiding of all *Scruple and Doubtfulness*.

The Rubric before the general Confession was the same in both Books: thus;

“ Then shall this *general Confession* be  
 “ made in the Name of all those that are  
 “ mynded to receyve the Holy Communi-  
 “ on, eyther by *one of them*, or els by *one*  
 “ *of the Ministers*, or by the Priest him-  
 “ self, all kneeling humbly upon theyr  
 “ Knees. The Exhortation before this  
 Rubric, in the first Book was thus: “ You  
 “ that do truly and earnestly repent you  
 “ of your Sinnes *to almightie God*,—make  
 “ your humble Confession to almightie  
 “ God, *and to his holy Church* here ga-  
 “ ther'd together in his Name, mekely  
 “ knelyng upon your Knees. The second  
 Book left out *to almightie God* in the first  
 part; and instead of, *and to his holy Church*,  
 read, *before this Congregation*.

The Rubric after the general Confession was thus:

“ Then shall the Priest [or the Byshop  
 “ being present] stand up, and turning  
 “ hymself to the People, *say thus*; Al-  
 “ mighty, &c. N. B. The Words with-  
 in Hooks are added in the second Book.  
 After the Restoration of K. Charles the 2d.  
 instead of the Words, *say thus*; the Words,  
*pronounce this Absolution*, were put at the  
 close of this Rubric. At the same time,  
 in the Rubric before the Absolution in the  
 Visitation of the Sick, instead of *make a*  
*special Confession*; *be moved to make a spe-*  
*cial Confession OF HIS SINS*. And after  
 the Words; *Absolve him*, this Parenthe-  
 sis (if he humbly and heartily desire it.)  
 I leave it to be enquired, in what Age of  
 the Church, such a Form of Words, as is  
 used in the first Part of the Absolution in  
 the Visitation of the Sick, and in the Com-  
 munion Service (which was in the Year  
 1661. first called an *Absolution to be pro-*  
*nounced*) was introduced; a Form, where-  
 in the Direction of the Priest is to the Peo-  
 ple, and yet his praying to God for Par-  
 don is preserv'd, at least virtually. I look  
 on it as a *Medium*, between pure *Prayer to*  
*God for his Pardon of the Peoples Sins*, and  
 the Priest's *Absolution* of them by an *Au-*  
*thority*