St. Anthony Mary Claret

ANTIDOTE AGAINST THE PROTESTANT CONTAGION

Antídoto contra el contagio protestante

From the Spanish of the Colección de opúsculos, vol. III (Barcelona, 1860)

English translation

Contributed to Mind of the Church by a friend of the library who wishes to remain anonymous

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About this translation

Translated from *Antídoto contra el contagio protestante*, in the *Colección de opúsculos* of Claret, vol. III (Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1860). The translation is complete.

The notes give the references to Claret's sources and the notes he printed himself; the modern editors' commentary and the translator's own remarks are not reproduced.

First Conversation

Pedro and Ramón

Pedro. Good afternoon, Ramón.

Ramón. Welcome, Pedro. And how did your journey to Barcelona go?

P. Happily, my friend. It was many years since I had visited that fine capital. In the few weeks I have just spent there, I could easily see the constant, general transformation that is going on in it in every respect. How far it is nowadays, in body and in morals, from what it was when you were studying at one of its colleges and I was serving the apprenticeship of my trade! What customs now, so opposed to those of that time! What licence one sees at the very first glance in the way a great part of its inhabitants live and talk! I could tell you many things that astonished me and horrified me not a little. Here is one among others. As I was walking one day along one of its busiest streets, I saw in front of the door of a café a large knot of curious people listening attentively to a decently dressed man who was preaching in their midst. I went up, and I too was one of his audience for as long as the sermon lasted. From what I could hear, the whole of it was a string of insults and invectives against the Catholic religion. I did not want to leave without first asking who this apostolic man was. A friend who had been listening to him, as I had, satisfied my curiosity. He told me that this preacher was a Protestant minister who, out of pity for the fanaticism of Spanish Catholics, had set out to travel through Spain to instruct us by preaching the pure truth.

This surprised me somewhat, convinced as I was that the pure truth is found only in Catholicism. More than surprise, I can assure you, it caused me horror. For I had just heard said in public things entirely opposed to what I was taught by my unforgettable parents, who were, as you know, little saints \[*unos santitos*: an affectionate diminutive, roughly “regular little saints”\] and died as such. All the same, and in spite of everything, since for lack of schooling I do not know the religion of my parents and my own thoroughly, that sermon has filled my head with doubts that I would like to clear away. To manage it, I thought I would put them to you. You are a man of talent and of solid, sound learning, and that gives me every confidence of soon getting out of the unsettled state that Protestant minister left me in. It was an evil hour when I stopped to listen to him… From what I have seen, there are many different religions among men, and first of all I would like you to be so good as to name them for me.

R. I will do it with great pleasure, and then I will answer every question you think fit to put to me. The religions in the world are indeed many and various. There is the religion of the Jews, that of the Mussulmans, and a countless number of pagan or idolatrous religions that it would be long and tiresome to list. There is besides the Christian Catholic religion, and an endless number of heretical or Protestant sects which, while they separated from it, claim to be Christian and call themselves so.

P. Agreed. But can a man be saved in any of those religions?

R. By no means. Man cannot be saved except in the true Religion. Jesus Christ has said, and reason tells us too, that this is not and cannot be more than one. Which is it? I will say so without hesitating. It is the Catholic religion, for it is the only one that God himself founded and established.

P. And how can we know and be sure that, among the many religions that boast of being Christian, only the Catholic one is the true one?

R. Very easily. Jesus Christ said that the Church that was to profess his religion must be *one*, and that it would be *holy*. He commanded his Apostles to preach it and spread it over the whole earth: *Going into the whole world*, he said to them, *preach the Gospel to every creature, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you… He that heareth you, heareth me… And I will be with you even to the consummation of the world.* To St. Peter in particular he said: *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it… Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, shall be loosed in heaven.*[1] Accordingly, the true Church or Religion will be the one that unites the four signs just mentioned. That is: one that is *one*; *holy*; preached by the Apostles, or *apostolic*; and spread over the whole earth, or *catholic*, which means universal. Such is the one we call the *Roman Church*, because St. Peter set up and fixed his See in Rome.

P. Would you be so kind as to show me the unity, holiness, apostolicity and catholicity of the Roman Church?

R. It is as easy to show as it is obvious to see and recognize. The Roman Church is *one*, because all its members or children have one and the same faith. They believe the same dogmas, have the same Sacraments, follow the same morals and the same doctrine of Jesus Christ. All of them acknowledge him as their invisible head, and the Roman Pontiff as his vicar, or the visible head of the Church.

It is *holy*, because Jesus Christ its founder is holy, its Sacraments are holy, its doctrine is holy, and it makes holy those who keep it.

It is *apostolic*. In fulfilment of the command they received from their divine Master, the Apostles preached the Gospel over the whole earth, as Sacred Scripture records, and Scripture cannot err. And the doctrine the Apostles taught is the same that the Roman Church believes and teaches.

It is *catholic*, that is, universal, because it is spread through every part of the world. The individuals it alone counts in its bosom are more numerous than those of all the sects together that pride themselves on being Christian.

P. How can we be sure that the Pope or Pontiff who resides in Rome is the supreme and true visible head of the true Church of Jesus Christ?

R. We are sure and certain of it, because the present Pope, like all his predecessors, is, as the histories record, a true and legitimate successor of St. Peter. Peter was appointed by Jesus Christ himself the supreme, legitimate and true visible head of his visible and true Church, which is to last until the end of the world, as the Gospel declares.

P. Is there any difference between these two things: *Catholic Religion* and *Catholic Church*?

R. There is some. *Catholic Religion* means the Gospel Law, established and taught by Jesus Christ and preached by the Apostles. *Catholic Church* means the gathering or community of the baptized faithful who profess and follow that Religion or law.

P. If St. Peter has had successors, it seems to me that the other Apostles will have had theirs. From that I gather that a certain hierarchy is needed in the Church, is it not so?

R. That is so. The Catholic Church is like a great family, and we all know that in a family there are father, mother and children. Jesus Christ has placed, and will go on placing, Popes and Bishops in his Church. As successors, the first of St. Peter and the second of the other Apostles, they rule and govern the faithful as fathers. This is what we call the *mother* or *teaching* Church. The faithful who hear and obey it are called the *daughter* or *believing* Church. But since the two are only one and the same family, they form only one and

the same Church.[2]

P. Has the Catholic Church always believed and taught the same doctrine?

R. Always. It has never varied, nor can it vary, in matters of faith and Christian morals.

P. How can that be? Has the Church not added several articles of faith to the Creed or Symbol of the Apostles?

R. The Apostles judged it fitting and sufficient in their time to put only the chief truths of faith into the Symbol. They could have inserted the others in it if they had thought it necessary then. As time went on, heretics denied and attacked those other truths. That is why the Church, clothed with the same power as the Apostles, judged it fitting and necessary to include them in the Creed. In doing so it made clear that it was not requiring belief in any new dogma. It was requiring belief in certain other truths which, though not contained in the Symbol, the faithful had always believed, from the very times of the Apostles.

P. Can the Catholic Church err in teaching the dogmas of faith and of Christian morals?

R. It cannot err, because Jesus Christ promised it his assistance for as long as the ages last.[3]

P. What is the rule of faith that we must follow in order to know all that we must believe?

R. The rule we must follow is the doctrine of Jesus Christ contained in the Sacred Scriptures and holy Traditions, both taught and explained by holy Church as teacher. The Church alone is charged by Jesus Christ with instructing us. Whoever hears the Church hears God, and whoever despises the Church despises God himself.[4]

P. What are the holy Scriptures?

R. They are sacred books in which the word of God is written by the inspiration and command of God himself. Some of these books form what is called the Old Testament, and the others the New. The first were written before the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. The second were written afterwards by the Apostles and Evangelists, who included in them part of their divine Master's doctrine.

P. You also spoke of traditions. Would you do me the favour of telling me what they are?

R. The Apostles and Evangelists did not write down all that Jesus Christ had taught them. They were content to teach the faithful by word of mouth certain truths that they too had learned by word of mouth. So traditions are the unwritten part of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which the Church has faithfully preserved and handed down from apostolic times to our own day.

P. How do we know that the Gospels and the other books of the New Testament are by the Apostles and therefore contain the word of God?

R. We know it because they were all written when the faithful already knew their truths. Had the Apostles not written them, the faithful and the Apostles themselves would have protested against the forger or forgers.

P. And what reason is there for believing that the books of the Old Testament contain the word of God?

R. There is a very conclusive reason: Jesus Christ himself said so. Being, as he is, God, he cannot err.

P. And who assures us that Jesus Christ is God?

R. He himself. He not only said that he was God, but proved and demonstrated it by his works and miracles.

P. Will you tell me what miracles Jesus Christ worked in proof of his divinity?

R. He instantly cured every kind of illness, gave sight to the blind and speech to the dumb, and worked a thousand other wonders no less, and even more, astounding, such as raising the dead even when their bodies were already decaying. The chief of all his miracles, however, was raising himself on the third day after his

death, something that would have been utterly impossible for him if he were not God.

P. How do we know that Jesus Christ came into the world, worked miracles and died?

R. We know it because not only do the Evangelists bear witness to it, but so do the histories written by the Jews and by the gentiles of those times.

P. And who assures us that he rose again?

R. The proofs of his resurrection assure us, which are unanswerable and indestructible. So do more than five hundred eyewitnesses.[5] Not only did they see him risen several times; many of them ate and drank with him, spoke to him and heard him speak, kissed his feet, and so on. So large and so respectable a number of witnesses is the most irrefutable testimony to so astounding a truth. This is above all so when we consider the unconquerable constancy with which they believed and proclaimed it, and the persecutions and torments they suffered for that reason, since they all died for it.

P. Is it certain that the holy Scriptures, just as the Church presents them to us, are the true ones, with no admixture of error?

R. Most certain. Besides being infallible in teaching dogma and morals, the Church has always and everywhere watched with the utmost care to preserve in all their integrity and purity the Sacred Scriptures, of which it is the depositary.

P. The Protestants rebel against the Christian Church, yet call themselves Christians. What rules do they follow to know what they must believe and practise in order to be saved?

R. They admit no rule but the Sacred Scriptures, interpreted according to each one's whim.

P. So they too have and acknowledge the Sacred Scriptures?

R. Yes, they have them, but so adulterated that they are not the true ones. When they find in them something that does not suit their taste, they take it out, or put something else in its place, or give it a different sense. Hence nowadays the Protestants have hardly anything Christian left. They themselves know neither what they are nor what they believe. Some believe one thing, others another. What they believe today they stop believing tomorrow, because that is their fancy. Plunged in these swings and fluctuations, many of them have fallen into scepticism and doubt everything. Some have had, and have, the impudence to wrap even the divinity of Jesus Christ in the same doubt. Fine Christians they would be!

From this sink of errors and doubts every kind of monstrosity has come out and keeps coming out. From Protestantism have come the clubs or secret sects, the Masons, the Carbonari, the *Comuneros*,[6] the rationalists, the radicals, the revolutionaries and the socialists. At this moment and everywhere they threaten to make an end of every kind of authority, of all religion, of all order, and, as an inevitable consequence, of society itself.

P. If that is what Protestantism is, how is it that there are still Catholics who become Protestants?

R. I will not deny that there are some, but they are very few in number. These are either very ignorant or very vicious, and perhaps both together. If some learned Catholic enters or has entered Protestantism, take it as certain that, however much he says otherwise, he did not take that step out of conviction. He took it in order to give himself over with greater or complete licence to dissoluteness, to the most brutal and vile passions. The Protestants tolerate, authorize and legitimate everything. Such good Christians they are!

P. Well, man, if Protestantism is so ridiculous and so bad, how do you explain the eagerness and constancy with which its followers try to defend it and spread it?

R. The Protestants no longer consider themselves able to fight the Catholics face to face with any advantage, because every time they tried it the Catholics defeated them and pulverized their errors completely. What

their sects do now, although they disagree and detest one another, is join forces, each outdoing the others in inventing stories and lies to ridicule, slander and persecute the Catholics, the common target of their hatred and their poisoned shots. Such is the shameful tactic by which they mean to make proselytes and so spread their infernal doctrines, to the harm of the Catholic religion and of society.

P. Are the Protestants so bad, and so far astray?

R. And you doubt it? Just look. Free examination, that is, each one's private and arbitrary interpretation of the holy Bible: where else can it lead but to error? And do you not know that this is one of the fundamental principles of Protestantism? And is it not from this erroneous principle that the endless variations its followers have fallen into have sprung? And is it not from these variations and from that principle that the innumerable and ridiculous sects into which they are divided have arisen? And can a single one of them be named that has found the truth and professes it?… Undeceive yourself. All of them, and all their members, are in error.

As for being bad, I will tell you that not all of them are equally so. There are many people among the Protestants who, in matters of religion, have little or no instruction. So they do not know that the religion they follow is false. If they hate Catholics, it is because they do not know them and hear nothing but ill spoken of them. In this respect, then, I will not say that such people are bad. There are, however, other Protestants who are instructed enough to know that they are astray. Either they know it, or at least they doubt the truth of their religion. Yet instead of doing what is needed to get out of doubt, abandon error and embrace the true Religion, they cling obstinately to their error. They use every kind of lie and criminal baseness to persecute the true Religion, and to annihilate it if they could. These are worse than bad: they are the very worst.

P. And in view of so much and such fierce hatred, does the Church hate them?

R. Far from hating them, it prays for them, that they may be converted and saved. All good Catholics regard the Protestants as brothers gone astray. They are ready to lavish every kind of work of charity on them, even if it meant facing death for them, should their salvation require it.

P. You have said that the Protestants go astray and are perverted by interpreting the Bible as they please. But does not the same happen to many Catholics who do the same thing?

R. The rule of faith given to Catholics does not and cannot pervert anyone. So if some, not many, are perverted and go astray by reading the Sacred Scriptures, it is not because they follow that rule but because they stop following it. With the Protestants it is very different. Error and perversion flow naturally and necessarily from the very principle or rule of faith that they forged for themselves, namely the free interpretation they established and follow.

P. Since the Catholic religion is so good and holy, how is it that there are so many bad Catholics?

R. The Church, as a good mother, teaches her children nothing bad, and does all she can to make all of them good. If, in spite of her vigilance, care and warnings, some or many give free rein to their passions, who can and should be blamed for their perversion? It may be that they read books she forbids. It may be that they frequent certain houses or persons whose danger she points out and commands them to avoid. It may be that they see bad example where they should be given good, as she counsels and prescribes. Let them blame themselves, then, if they are bad, for they would not be bad if they listened to the tender and kindly voice of their kindly and tender mother. Whoever listens to her is good, and will be saved. Whoever refuses to listen to her, what can he be but bad? And what can he expect but his temporal and eternal ruin?…

P. My friend, I would very much like to prolong this conversation, as pleasant for me as it is instructive, for I still have many questions to put to you. The hour, however, is already late, and I see how much my importunities must have troubled you. If you would allow me, I would come back another day to take the

same liberty. I am all the more inclined to, as I see the extreme kindness and unfailing patience with which you deign to dispel all my doubts. Several, or rather many more, as I have hinted, are still left for me to put to you, and I hope you will kindly complete the work by finishing my instruction.

R. Even without the true and heartfelt friendship there is between us, I would still have my chief motive for instructing you, and that is charity. Clothed in it, as I believe I am, towards you and all who, like you, need religious instruction, do not be afraid of troubling me. Come when you like. Put all your doubts to me. Ask me as much as you wish. With God's help I hope to answer you satisfactorily, and to root more and more deeply in your heart the true and divine faith which alone can save us.

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[1] Mk 16:15 and Mt 28:19–20 (combined); Lk 10:16; Mt 28:20; Mt 16:18–19.

[2] *ecclesia docens* / *ecclesia discens*.

[3] Mt 28:20.

[4] Lk 10:16.

[5] 1 Cor 15:6.

[6] The *Confederación de Comuneros*, 1821.

Second Conversation

Pedro. Perhaps you will be surprised, my friend, that I have put off my second visit so long. Family business has kept me busy for eight days running. That did not stop me, though, from reflecting now and then on the clear and satisfying answers with which you were good enough to free me from the mistaken ideas instilled in me by that sermon I told you I had heard. Today I come with the same confidence as last time, increased by the friendly and priceless offers you made me. I come to put to you another series of difficulties that make me waver somewhat in my beliefs. The Church, it seems to me, has more than once gone to excesses of cruelty, and I do not know how to reconcile those excesses with the tenderness with which you say she loves all her children. The Inquisition of Spain, for example: does it not give us plenty of reasons to accuse the Church of cruelty?

Ramón. Let us be fair, friend Pedro, and not let ourselves be dazzled by appearances. The Church is not and never was cruel, and, guided by the spirit of charity that animates her, she never will be. I am well aware that the imaginary, or at least greatly exaggerated, cruelties of the Spanish Inquisition are the war-horse \[*caballo de batalla*: lit. "battle horse", i.e. their favourite, ever-ready argument\] with which the Protestants, and even many spurious Catholics, attack the Church. They throw at her the shameful nickname of cruel stepmother. But in this, as in everything, both are carried away by the passion of hatred, which swells or disfigures everything, and they say what they do not believe, or at least what they do not know. The Inquisition in Spain was never an ecclesiastical institution, but a civil tribunal subject to the Government of the kingdom. It is said that it condemned many thousands of heretics to the stake and tortured the accused to make them confess their crime. True; but was that not the legislation in force at that time, not only in Spain but in all Europe? Torture and the stake were in use in France, England, Germany and so on. And the Protestants themselves, in all those nations, used both against the Catholics. Why, then, attribute them to the Inquisition of Spain as if it alone had used them against heretics?… Of the countless kinds of torture laid at its door, at least three quarters are the offspring of hostile imaginations. Those who have an interest in discrediting the Church present them and stage them before the public, to fill it with the horror that they then set out, and know how, to exploit. Churchmen, particularly friars, always appear in such scenes. It is true that there were some in that Tribunal; but it is no less true that they never took part in any torture or any sentence of death. The sentences to the stake are inflated to many thousands more than the just and true number. And even if they were as many as is supposed and pretended, could they be compared with the torrents of innocent blood that would have been shed in Spain if Protestantism had slipped in among us, with its inevitable train of religious wars? It was the Inquisition that freed us from both.

P. Does the Pope not have his Inquisition in Rome too?

R. There is no doubt that he has; but neither is there any doubt that not a single sentence of death ever came from it. It detains and imprisons heretics, for the good of the Church and of the heretics themselves. It treats them with the greatest kindness, with the same kindness exhorts them to be converted, and releases them as soon as, once converted, they retract their errors. So it does with everyone, and so it did too with the celebrated GALILEO, whose case unbelievers and libertines made, and still make, so much noise about.

P. Have there not been Popes who, far from being good, have been very bad?

R. The Popes of the first five centuries were all Saints. In the later centuries they have generally been very good, and many of them Saints as well. It is true that in that long and venerable line of Fathers of Christendom there are two or three who, being men, had their weaknesses and faults. But not a single one can be named who failed in the faith. On the contrary, all of them strove more or less to have Jesus Christ known, honoured and adored everywhere. They sought to spread his Religion and worship everywhere, and many of them sealed with their own blood the doctrine they proclaimed and had proclaimed.

P. How is it that some superstitious people are found among Catholics?

R. If some Catholics are superstitious, it is certainly not the Church that taught them superstition. She detests and condemns it, and never ceases to cry out against the superstitious. Be it said in passing, they abound far more in other religions than in ours.

P. Is it true that we Catholics adore the Virgin Mary and the Saints?

R. Adoration, properly so called, is an act of *latria*, due to God alone. So to give it to a creature would be an act of idolatry. We honour and venerate the most holy Virgin Mary as the Mother of God that she is, and the Saints as his friends and courtiers that they are. Not infrequently, instead of the honour and veneration that we respectively render them, we say that we adore them. But then we mean adoration improperly so called, which in its widest sense can also be applied to the Saints and to Mary, the Queen of them all. Even so, to avoid misunderstandings and to shut the mouths of the Protestants, who call us nothing less than idolaters, it would be good to avoid the word *adoration* even in our speech, replacing it with *veneration* and *honour*.[1]

P. Can the Saints intercede for us?

R. That the Saints can intercede for us is clearly deduced from the holy Scriptures. In them we see that St. Stephen, St. Paul and others, while still alive, prayed for their brethren who were also living. And St. Peter promised the faithful that he would pray for them after his death.[2] If the Saints can do this, how much more will Mary, their Queen and Mother of God, be able to do it? Hence we may lawfully and profitably invoke the powerful intercession of the Saints and of Mary.

P. Is it pleasing to God that we venerate and pray to the Virgin Mary and the Saints?

R. Both things cannot fail to be very pleasing to him. Though by them we honour Mary and the Saints, both redound to the glory of God himself. Besides, is not anyone glad when his relatives and dependants are honoured? How then would the Persons of the most holy Trinity not be glad to see honoured, and invoked as intercessor, their Daughter, Spouse and Mother? And to see honoured and invoked as intercessors those whom we have called their courtiers and friends?

P. In what sense does the Church call the Virgin Mary *our Life, our Sweetness and our Hope, Gate of heaven, Health, Comfort, Refuge,* and so on?

R. In giving these and other titles to the most holy Virgin, we do not mean that she is the Author of life, of grace and so on. We acknowledge and express that through her most powerful Intercession we can obtain, and hope to obtain, from God all the graces we need in this life, and eternal glory in the next.

P. Are the Saints in heaven perhaps in a state to merit?

R. They are not in a state to merit. But they are in a state to remember their past merits and present them to God. With these, united to the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, they can obtain for us the graces and favours we ask.

P. Can the Saints work miracles?

R. Moses, Elijah, Elisha, the Apostles and others, all of them saints already in this life, worked a great many great miracles, as we read in the Sacred Scriptures. And if they, and others like them, clothed with the power of God, worked wonders in former times, what reason can be given for denying that they can work the same, or greater, miracles now? Have they perhaps fallen out of favour with their God? Or has God deprived himself of their means for working the wonders with which he is pleased to favour us?…

P. Can we believe in apparitions of Saints, Angels, devils and the dead?

R. The testimony of the holy Bible does not allow us to doubt that the devil appeared to Adam and Eve in paradise, and to Jesus Christ in the desert. We know by the same channel that several Angels appeared to Abraham, Jacob, Daniel, Tobias, Zechariah, most holy Mary, St. Joseph and many others. We likewise know by the same channel that Samuel, Onias and Jeremiah appeared after death, the first to Saul and the other two to Judas Maccabeus.[3] The Gospel, finally, assures us too that when Jesus Christ died, several of the dead rose and appeared to various people in Jerusalem. It tells us that Jesus Christ, once risen, appeared many times to his disciples, and that after ascending into heaven he appeared to St. Stephen and to Saul (St. Paul), and so on. Consequently, if all these apparitions took place because they were possible, why should they not be possible now? If Angels, Saints, devils and the dead made their apparitions by God's order or permission, who will dare to say that they cannot repeat them with the same permission or order?

P. Is it certain that besides heaven and hell there is another place called purgatory?

R. The Sacred Scriptures tell us that *it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins.*[4] Which dead can these be? Certainly not those whose souls are in heaven, for no soul with the least stain of sin enters there or can enter. Nor are they those condemned to hell, for there no redemption is possible… So there must be a third place, where souls disfigured by slight faults can expiate them, and then obtain the eternal reward they merited. This place of expiation is precisely what we call purgatory. It is certain, then, that there is one.[5]

P. Is it possible for us to relieve the souls in purgatory?

R. Very possible. It is certain not only that we can offer God our vows, prayers, alms and sacrifices for them, but also that God can accept them, and does accept them. So it will be an act of true and profitable charity to do good to the dead in any of these ways, especially the last.

P. Can the Church grant indulgences and pronounce excommunications?

R. She has power for both. The Apostles could excommunicate, and did excommunicate; they could grant indulgences, and did grant them, as we read in the books of the New Testament. So the Bishops, who have the same power as the Apostles, whose successors they are, can do the same.

P. Who instituted the Mass, Jesus Christ or the Church?

R. Since the Mass consists principally and essentially in the consecration, it is certain that Jesus Christ instituted it. He celebrated the first Mass on the night before his passion, when he consecrated the bread and the wine, changing them into his own body and blood. And he not only instituted the Mass. He also made or created his Apostles priests, with power to create others in their turn, so that all of them, doing what he had just done, might do it in memory of him.[6]

It was not the Church, then, that instituted the Mass. All the Church has done is institute and prescribe certain ceremonies, which signify or recall the life, passion and death of the Saviour, in order to solemnize fittingly the most sublime act of our holy Religion.

P. Since the Mass is the chief act of the Christian religion, how is it that the Church does not order it always to be celebrated with solemnity and with a sermon?

R. The Church, our holy and wise mother, has established and commanded that on feast days, when the faithful must attend the holy sacrifice of the altar, a Mass with a sermon or instruction for the people be celebrated in every parish. As for solemn Masses, not only are they celebrated on those days, but thousands are sung every day throughout Christendom. Yet it is not possible for all of them to be solemnized like this. Moreover, the Mass, even a low Mass \[*rezada*: lit. "said", as opposed to sung\], gives God greater glory than all the blessed together can give him in a whole eternity. So the Church allows priests to celebrate it every day, with solemnity or without it.

P. Has the Mass always been in use?

R. Mass has always been celebrated in the Church. The Apostles and their disciples celebrated it, and in Rome a portable altar on which St. Peter celebrated it is still preserved. Since then, the Mass being the only sacrifice the Church can offer to God, all the holy Fathers and the other priests have gone on celebrating it without interruption in every century, as tradition and history make clear to us.

P. Are we obliged to fulfil what the Church commands us?

R. We are, under pain of sin. For Jesus Christ has said that whoever disobeys the Church disobeys God, and must be regarded by her as a heathen and a publican.[7]

P. The Church teaches us that Jesus Christ instituted seven Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Order and Matrimony. Will you tell me when he instituted Baptism?

R. He instituted it when he himself was baptized by his precursor, St. John, called the Baptist. And he promulgated it when he said to his Apostles: *Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*[8]

P. Is Baptism necessary for salvation?

R. So much so that, as Jesus Christ says in the Gospel, whoever is not baptized cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.[9]

P. When did Christ institute Confirmation?

R. When he sent the Holy Spirit upon his Apostles.

P. Is there an obligation to receive Confirmation?

R. Although Confirmation is not as necessary for salvation as Baptism, there is nonetheless a precept to receive it.

P. When did Christ institute the sacrament of the Eucharist?

R. At nightfall on Holy Thursday, that is, the night before his passion, when by consecrating the bread and the wine he changed each substance into his own body and blood.

P. Is Jesus Christ really and truly in the most holy Sacrament of the altar?

R. He himself says in the holy Gospel that his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed.[10] He does not say that they are so figuratively, as the Protestants claim, but truly. It follows that, although hidden under the sacramental species, Jesus Christ is truly and really present in the holy Eucharist.

P. Is the reception of Jesus Christ in holy Communion necessary and obligatory for the faithful?

R. It is, by divine and ecclesiastical precept. Jesus Christ declares in the Gospel that whoever does not eat his body and drink his blood will not have eternal life. We must, then, receive the Saviour in the Sacrament, and to receive him worthily we must prepare ourselves, as the Apostle commands.[11] Nor is one exempt from every duty by being unable to receive him sacramentally. One can and must then receive him, with due worthiness, spiritually or by desire. Communion under both kinds is neither necessary nor obligatory. It is true that it was in use for a long time. But in view of the drawbacks that communion from the chalice presented, the Church, moved by very grave reasons, decided with her never-failing wisdom and prudence that the faithful should communicate under one kind only, that of bread. This was all the more reasonable since no wrong is done them, for Jesus Christ is wholly present under either of the two kinds.

P. When did Jesus Christ institute the sacrament of Penance?

R. When he said to his Apostles, and in their persons to all priests: *Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall not forgive, they are not forgiven.* So we read it in the holy Gospel.[12]

P. Has the confession of sins always been in use?

R. Public confession was in use only until the fourth century, when it was abolished. But secret or auricular confession was always and everywhere in use in the whole Church, from the times of the Apostles to our own, as all the histories bear unanswerable witness.

P. I am afraid you are mistaken in this. It seems to me that auricular confession was instituted by the Fourth Lateran Council in the thirteenth century.

R. No, my friend, it is not I who am mistaken, but you. And others do worse than make a mistake: knowing the contrary, they circulate such a falsehood as if it were true. What that Council of Lateran did, in view of the culpable negligence of many Christians in going to confession, was to oblige them all to confess at least once a year. At most, then, it can be said that this Council established *annual* confession. But the institution of Confession cannot in any way be attributed to it without openly violating the truth. Confession is of DIVINE INSTITUTION, and in all the earlier centuries it was practised in the churches of every country, from the very beginning of Christianity.

P. Is Confession necessary for salvation?

R. Confession is the second and last plank left to the sinner to save himself from eternal shipwreck. Once innocence is lost, no means of salvation remains to him but penance. And what penance is easier and surer than that of the Sacrament of that name? So whoever does not have recourse to it when he could, or rather, whoever does not obtain from priests the pardon of his own sins after confessing them when confession is possible for him, will not have them pardoned in heaven either, according to what Jesus Christ said to his Apostles. Here, then, is the alternative in which the Christian sinner finds himself: confession or damnation. That is, if he is in mortal sin, and can confess but will not.

P. When did Jesus Christ institute the sacrament of Extreme Unction?

R. He instituted it implicitly when he instituted that of Penance; but he declared it explicitly as such when he promulgated it through the Apostle St. James.[13]

P. Are the sick in danger of death obliged to receive it?

R. Of course they are. Jesus Christ instituted it to make salvation easier for us, and we must use every means that leads to salvation.

P. When did he institute the sacrament of Order?

R. When he ordained his Apostles priests.

P. Can it really be said that Jesus Christ instituted Matrimony?

R. Considered as a natural contract, Matrimony was not instituted by Jesus Christ. It had already been instituted from the beginning of the world, when, the first woman having been created, God gave her to the first man, and he accepted her as his consort. But considered as a Sacrament, Jesus Christ instituted it when he said: *What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder*. With these words the Lord also expresses the indissolubility of Matrimony, which the Apostle St. Paul then explained so clearly.[14]

P. Do you not think it would be better if priests married too?

R. Quite the contrary. To me it seems infinitely better that they remain unmarried. I have two reasons for thinking so. First, because according to the doctrine of Jesus Christ the state of continence is more perfect than that of Matrimony, and persons consecrated to God ought to consecrate to him what is best. Second, because the priest, being unmarried, is always free for the things of God and the salvation of souls, which are the two sole objects of the priesthood. Besides, not being married, and with his living assured, he can easily help the poor. If he were married and had a family, everything would stay at home for them.[15]

P. Does the Church, or rather the priests, not demand some payment from the faithful for administering the Sacraments and other holy things?

R. Holy Church administers Confirmation, Penance, Communion, Extreme Unction and Order free of charge. Only for Baptism and Matrimony is something paid. But it is not demanded for those Sacraments; it is for the work of writing the entries and for the upkeep of the parish books. Priests also commonly receive something for applying the Mass. But they do not receive it as its price; they receive it as a stipend or alms to support themselves. Finally, priests have their fees fixed for singing, for more or less solemn funerals, and so on. But these things, which though holy are not Sacraments, are paid for only by reason of the material work or the solemnity.

P. Would it not be better if priests received nothing by reason of their ministry?

R. The Apostle St. Paul said to the Corinthians: *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we reap your carnal things?*[16] St. Thomas explains these words thus: "If through our preaching you have received the faith and the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are goods of inestimable price, will you be doing much in giving us a part of your temporal goods, so that we may live?" Priests, like other men, need their food, their clothing and so on. And being ministers of the altar, they must live by the altar.[17] Priestly functions, though principally and substantially spiritual, nonetheless have their material side. Are priests alone not to be worthy of being paid for their work? They cannot follow any other career incompatible with their profession in order to live and dress with the decency proper to their state.

P. Does the Church not make people pay for the dispensations she grants?

R. Whoever applies in person to Rome for a dispensation from some degree of kinship, or any other, has very little to pay. And that little he pays the Church does not demand for herself. It goes to cover the expenses of the offices, or to pay the salaries of the notaries, clerks and others of the Curia. As for those who wish to marry with a dispensation without stirring from Spain, it usually costs them very dear. For since the Spanish Government does not allow the graces of Rome to take effect without passing through its hands, those who receive them have to pay a great deal; but not to the Church, to the Government.[18]

P. How is it that the richer those who ask for such dispensations are, the larger the sum the Church demands of them?

R. For various and very just reasons, the Church has forbidden marriages between relatives. But since preventing them absolutely could sometimes have many grave drawbacks, in certain cases she lifts her

prohibition by means of dispensations. She grants these, however, only when a true and sufficient cause is alleged. And so that marriages between relatives may be as few as possible, she imposes on the poor a personal penance, and on those with means a greater or smaller sum, which she then spends on pious works.

P. Has the Church not sometimes forbidden the faithful to read the holy Scriptures in the vernacular?

R. The Church forbids the faithful to read the holy Bible without notes, but not with them. The reason is that there are many obscure places or passages in it, and the faithful could easily go wrong if they did not see notes at the foot of the text to explain them. The Church has also forbidden, and with more than abundant reason still forbids, the Bibles of the Protestants and those printed by them. Both the one and the other are falsified or adulterated on many points.[19]

P. Is faith alone enough for the Christian to be saved?

R. By no means. For faith without works, says Scripture, is a dead faith.[20] And besides, Jesus Christ declares there too that he will cast into hell those who did not do good works. So neither works without faith, nor faith without works, are enough for salvation.

P. And which are the good works we must do?

R. *If thou wilt enter into life* (that is, into heaven), said Jesus Christ, *keep the commandments.*[21] Which commandments are these? Those of the Decalogue. But are these the only ones we must fulfil? No. We are also obliged to fulfil those of the Church. She can command us, and does command us, in God's name, what she judges fitting and necessary for our salvation. Whoever obeys her obeys God, and whoever despises her commands despises God's, as Jesus Christ declares in the Gospel. Hence both sets of commandments bind us, and we must keep them to be saved. Nor is even this enough: each one must also fulfil the duties proper to his own state. By fulfilling in this way what he owes to God, to his neighbour and to himself, a man can be saved, and will be saved. But if he does not, what can he expect but his eternal ruin?

P. We are told that the Church is a visible society, and that we must worship God with an external and visible worship. But do you not think that this contradicts the words of Jesus Christ, according to which we must adore God in spirit and in truth?[22]

R. The Church militant, that is, the Church that Jesus Christ founded on earth, is and must be a visible society. Jesus Christ, its founder, became man in order to become visible. The Apostles who preached and spread it were visible. Preaching, the administration of the Sacraments and so on are visible. And we ourselves, who form the body of the Church, are visible. What more is needed for it to be said in all truth that the Church is a really visible society? As for the words of Jesus Christ, there is not a shadow of contradiction between them and the external worship that the Church prescribes to us as due to God. Jesus Christ spoke them after complaining of the hypocritical Jews. They were content to honour God with their lips and with the Mosaic ceremonies, which prefigured our worship, without the heart taking any part in these outward acts of their religion. Jesus Christ did not, then, proscribe external and visible worship. He complained that it was not accompanied by internal worship, without which it is worth nothing. And he said that the hour had already come when there would be true adorers who would honour and adore God, no longer with mere externals, but with an interior, spiritual and true worship. This is the foundation and the soul of the whole worship we owe to God. But external worship is its complement, since it fosters and sustains it. We owe both to God; but the two must form only one worship, one not unworthy of us and worthy of God.[23]

P. What do you think of freedom of worship? Would it be well to introduce it into Spain?

R. May God deliver us, now and always, from so great a calamity! I assure you, and if you think about it even a little you will easily understand it, that this would be the worst of all the misfortunes that could befall us. What evils would it not bring upon us! For us it would be a real catastrophe! Even now, when by good fortune and our great happiness we enjoy Catholic union and unity, we are so divided in everything else.

What would become of us the day we lacked that last and only bond of union, which alone can still give us some hope of becoming again what we once were? Alas, my friend, you know it already. To the astonishment of all Spain and the satanic joy of her enemies, some Spaniards, certainly unworthy of that name, had set out to bring plurality and freedom of worship into our house… It is not easy, nor even possible, to describe the utter confusion and horrible disorder that we would already be seeing and touching among us at this hour, had they achieved their aims. Let those who may in future set out to plunge us into such chaos be called *Fathers of the country*, or anything else people please. Every good Spaniard would not fail to hold them up to the execration of the ages under the title of *Parricides* \[*Patricidas*: a coinage on *patria*, "murderers of the fatherland", playing on *Padres de la patria*\]. In my view, those who attempted such a thing and carried it out would commit three crimes, each more enormous than the last. First, against God, by giving occasion for many to turn away from his true and legitimate worship. Second, against souls, by giving occasion for many to transgress and take another road than the true and only one that God traced for us to be saved. Third, against society, by sowing in it a fruitful and endless seed of discord, of blood and of ruin!… Just look at what happened in France, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, England and every country where freedom of worship, forever baleful, was established. How many disorders! How many wars! And what torrents of blood that ill-starred freedom of worship has caused to be shed in all those nations for three hundred years!!!… May God deliver us, I repeat, and deliver Spain now and always, from so great and deplorable a calamity!…

P. I desire the same, my friend, now that I am undeceived and free of the erroneous ideas that, through my own fault and misfortune, had seeped into my understanding and somewhat perverted my will. There is just one more thing I would like to ask you, to close this second conversation of ours. Like the first, and more than the first, it has gone on a long time, no doubt because of my indiscretions. Would you be so kind as to tell me what those people called Socialists are, and what we should think of them?

R. I will tell you with great pleasure, and in few words. The Socialists are the most degraded and perverse beings ever born of woman, so much so that one could hardly believe they are of the human race, did one not know that the infernal race does not reproduce itself as the human does. Do you want to be convinced of it? Listen to the profession of faith of Proudhon, one of their leaders, as audaciously impious as he is blasphemous, and as blasphemous as Lucifer:

"God, if there is one, is essentially hostile to our nature, and we in no way depend on his authority. We come to possess knowledge in spite of him, and in spite of him we come to attain our well-being. Each of our advances is a victory in which the Divinity is smashed to pieces.

"God, behold thee dethroned and shattered. Thy name, which for so long was the hope of the poor and the refuge of the repentant sinner, this same name will from now on be the target of contempt and anathema. It will be hissed among men, for the name of God is nothing but folly and cowardice, hypocrisy and lies, tyranny and misery: God is evil. As long as there are men who prostrate themselves before an altar, mankind will be unhappy. God, depart from me! For, now instructed and freed from fear of thee, I swear from this day, with my hand stretched out towards heaven, that thou hast been until now the executioner of my reason.

"The conclusion or summary of social science is this: there is for man only one duty, one sole religion, to deny God. *Hoc est primum et maximum mandatum* \[This is the first and greatest commandment\].

"Let the priests be persuaded once and for all that true virtue, the virtue that makes us worthy of eternal truth, consists in fighting against religion and against God.

"Property is theft. Perhaps in two thousand years such an expression will not be said again. All my goods on earth consist in this definition of property, and I hold it more precious than the millions of Rothschild… Mr. Michelet tells me that in France there are twenty-five million proprietors who will not want to give up their goods. And why suppose that we need their consent for that?… etc., etc."

I cannot express to you, friend Pedro, the horror I have felt in uttering, as I repeated them to you, this series of most horrible and unheard-of blasphemies… From that you can see what they are, and foresee what those monsters would do once they were unleashed and put their infernal doctrines into practice. We have seen something of this this year in Andalusia and above all in Castile. And… (I cannot help being indignant when I recall it)… we have heard such barbarous excesses impudently attributed to the Clergy, and especially to the Jesuits!… What blindness! Or rather, what refined and diabolical malice!!!

Beware, friend Pedro, and guard your children against the maxims of the Socialists and the Protestants, who join hands to bring about the ruin of the world. Both stir and work without ceasing to gain ground day by day. They open a way for themselves everywhere with the noxious and bewitching ideas they set flying to corrupt the common people. When they cannot work otherwise, they work in darkness, so as to burst out in their day like a volcano and reduce the whole world to ashes with their filthy, burning lava. So much malice among men seems impossible. But it seems more impossible still that there should have been, in honourable and Catholic Spain, men so perverse as to tolerate and foster it. They want to put us, we are told, *at the height of the century* \[*á la altura del siglo*: i.e. abreast of the times, up to date\]. And I see that the higher we climb, the worse the falls we take… Religion, which alone can save us from the horrible cataclysm that threatens us, has lately been more than once systematically set aside, trampled and persecuted… Fortunately, by an undeserved effect of his mercy towards us, God has so far restrained the wicked and prevented them from completing their work. But woe to us the day when, tired at last of our criminal follies, he hands us over in his inexorable justice to our reprobate sense!…[24] Spain, which is no longer what she was, will then cease to be what she still IS…

P. Like you, I am deeply horrified by all you have just told me about Socialists and Protestants, and I tremble at what may befall us if God lets his avenging hand fall upon us. I did not see things with the same eyes as you. That is not surprising, for my sight does not reach as far as yours. Besides, certain conversations, to say the least indiscreet, in which I took part more than once; certain pamphlets, newspaper serials and anti-religious books to which I gave myself up not a few times; and above all the impassioned ranting of that Protestant minister I heard in Barcelona, had infected me with endless prejudices against the Church and her sacred ministers, and I no longer felt such a good Catholic as before. The worst of it is that my children, following my example, are very far from being good Christians. But I promise you that from today I am going to do with them what you have just done with me. How many would cease to be impious if they were instructed, or were willing to be instructed, as you have deigned to instruct this grateful friend of yours!

End of the Antidote against Protestantism.

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[1] *dulia*. *hyperdulia*.

[2] Acts 7:60 (Stephen); e.g.

[3] 1 Sam 28:11–19 (Samuel to Saul); 2 Macc 15:12–16 (Onias and Jeremiah in Judas Maccabeus's dream).

[4] 2 Macc 12:46 (Vulgate).

[5] cites 2 Macc 12:46.

[6] Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24–25.

[7] Mt 18:17; Lk 10:16.

[8] Mt 3:13–17; Mt 28:19.

[9] Jn 3:5.

[10] Jn 6:56 (Vulgate 6:56; modern versions 6:55).

[11] Jn 6:54; 1 Cor 11:27–29.

[12] Jn 20:22–23.

[13] Jas 5:14–15.

[14] Gen 2:22–24; Mt 19:6; Eph 5:25–32; 1 Cor 7:10–11.

[15] Mt 19:12 and 1 Cor 7:32–35 are cited there.

[16] 1 Cor 9:11.

[17] 1 Cor 9:13.

[18] *pase regio*.

[19] Catholic editions still carry notes (Code of Canon Law, can. 825).

[20] Jas 2:17 and 2:26.

[21] Mt 19:17.

[22] Jn 4:23–24.

[23] Mt 15:8 (Is 29:13).

[24] Rom 1:28 (“God delivered them up to a reprobate sense”).