

Hic stultitiæ eo usque processerat, ut omnes etiam sanctos viros, quibus aut studium inerat lectionis, aut propositum erat certare jejuniis, tanquam Priscilliani socios et discipulos, in crimen arcesseret. Ausus etiam miser est, Martino episcopo, viro plane apostolis conferendo, palam objectare hæresis infamiam:— quia non desinebat increpare Ithacium, ut ab accusatione desisteret.’ And when the leaders were put to death, the heresy increased more, and honoured Priscillian as a martyr, and reproached the orthodox as wicked persecutors: and the end was, that the church was filled by it with divisions and manifold mischiefs, and all the most godly made the common scorn. ‘Inter hæc plebs Dei et optimus quisque, probro atque ludibrio habebatur.’ They are the last words of Severus’s History; and changing the names are calculated for another meridian, and for later years.

CHAPTER IX.

How to behave ourselves in the Public Assemblies, and the Worship there performed, and after them.

I HAVE purposely given such particular Directions in Part ii, on this subject, and written so many books about it*, and said so much also in the Cases of Conscience, that I shall here only cast in a few common Directions, lest the reader think I make a balk.

Direct. 1. ‘Let your preparations in secret and in your family on the beginning of the Lord’s days, be such as conduce to fit you for the public worship.’ Run not to church as ungodly people do, with a carnal heart, that never sought God before you went, nor considered what you go about; as if all your religion were to make up the number of the auditors; and you thought God must not be worshipped and obeyed at home, but only in the church. God may in mercy meet with an unprepared heart, and open his eyes and heart, and save him; but he hath made no promise of it to any such. He that goeth to worship that God at church, whom he forgetteth and despiseth in his heart and house,

* See my “Treatise of the Lord’s Day,” and my “Cure of Church Divisions.”

may expect to be despised by him. O consider what it is for a sinner that must shortly die, to go with the servants of God to worship him; to pray for his salvation, and to hear what God hath to say to him by his minister, for the life of his immortal soul!

Direct. II. 'Enter not into the holy assembly either superstitiously or irreverently.' Not as if the bending of the knee, and mumbling over a few words with a careless, ignorant mind, and spending an hour there as carelessly, would save your souls: nor yet as if the relation which the worship, the worshippers and the dedicated place have unto God, deserved not a special honour and regard. Though God be ever with us, every where; yet every time, and place, and person, and business is not equally related to God. And holiness is no unfit attribution, for that company or that place, which is related to God, though but by the lawful separation and dedication of man. To be uncovered in those countries where uncovering signifieth reverence, is very well becoming a reverent soul; except when the danger of cold forbids it. It is an unhappy effect of our contentions, that many that seem most reverent and holy, in their high regard of holy things, do yet carry themselves with more irreverent deportment, than those that themselves account profane. God is the God of soul and body, and must be worshipped by both: and while they are united, the actions of one are helpful to the other, as well as due and decent.

Direct. III. 'If you can, come at the beginning, that you may shew your attendance upon God, and your esteem of all his worship.' Especially in our assemblies, where so great a part of the duty, (as confession, praises, reading the Scriptures,) are all at the beginning. And it is meet that you thereby shew that you prefer public worship before private, and that needless businesses keep you not away.

Direct. IV. If you are free, and can do it lawfully, choose the most able, holy teacher that you can have, and be not indifferent whom you hear.' For O how great is the difference; and how bad are our hearts; and how great our necessity of the clearest doctrine, and the liveliest helps! Nor be you indifferent what manner of people you join with, nor what manner of worship is there performed; but in all

choose the best when you are free. But when you are not free, or can have no better, refuse not to make use of weaker teachers, or to communicate with faulty congregations in a defective, faulty manner of worship, so be it, you are not compelled to sin. And think not that all the faults of the prayers, or communicants are imputed to all that join with them in that worship; for then we should join with none in all the world.

Direct. v. 'When the minister is weak, be the more watchful against prejudice and sluggishness of heart, lest you lose all.' Mark that word of God which he readeth to you, and reverence, and love, and lay up that. It was the Law, read and meditated on, which David saith the godly do delight in. The sacred Scriptures are not so obscure and useless as the Papists do pretend, but convert the soul, and are able to make us wise unto salvation. Christ went ordinarily to the synagogues where even bad men did read Moses and the prophets every sabbath day. There are thousands that cannot read themselves, who must come to the assembly to hear that Word read, which they cannot read or hear at home. Every sentence of Scripture hath a Divine excellency, and therefore had we nothing but the reading of it, and that by a bad man, a holy soul may profit by it.

Direct. vi. 'Mind not so much the case of others present as yourselves: and think not so much how bad such and such a one is, and unworthy to be there, as how bad you are yourselves, and unworthy of communion with the people of the Lord, and what a mercy it is that you have admittance, and are not cast out from those holy opportunities.'

Direct. vii. 'Take heed of a peevish, quarrelsome humour, that disposeth you to carp at all that is said and done, and to find fault with every mode and circumstance, and to affect a causeless singularity, as thinking that your own ways, and words, and orders are far more excellent than other mens'. Think ill of nothing out of a quarrelsome disposition, but only as evidence constraineth you to dissent. And then remember that we are all imperfect, and faulty men must needs perform a faulty worship, if any, for it cannot be better than the agent.'

Direct. viii. 'When you meet with a word in a sermon or prayer, which you do not like, let it not stop you, and hinder your fervent and peaceable proceeding in the rest; as if you must not join in that which is good, if there be any faulty mixture in it. But go on in that which you approve, and thank God that pardoneth the infirmities of others as well as your own.'

Direct. ix. 'Conform yourselves to all the lawful gestures and customs of the church with which you join.' You come not thither proudly to shew the congregation, that you are wiser in the circumstances of worship than they, nor needlessly to differ from them, much less to harden men into a scorn of strictness, by seeing you place religion in singularities in lawful and indifferent things. But you come to exercise love, peace, and concord, and with one mind and mouth to glorify God. Stand when the church standeth; sit when the church sitteth; kneel when the church kneeleth, in cases where God doth not forbid it.

Direct. x. 'Take heed of a customary, formal, senseless heart, that tolerateth itself from day to day, to do holy things in a common manner, and with a common, dull, and careless mind; for that is to profane them.' Call in your thoughts when they attempt to wander; stir up your hearts when you feel them dull. Remember what you are about, and with whom it is that you have to do, and that you tread on the dust of them who had such opportunities before you which are now all gone, and so will yours. You hear and pray for more than your lives; therefore do it not as in jest or as asleep.

Direct. xi. 'Do all in faith and hope. Believe what you may get of God in prayer, and by an obedient hearing of his Word.' Would you not go cheerfully to the king, if he had promised you to grant whatever you ask? Hath not God promised you more than kings can give you? Oh it is an unbelieving and a despairing heart, that turneth all into dead formality! Did you but hope that God would do all that for you which he hath told you he will do, and that you might get more by prayer than by your trades, or projects, or all your friends, you would go to God with more earnestness and more delight.

Direct. xii. 'Apply all the Word of God to yourselves

according to its usefulness.' Ask as you go, 'How doth this concern me? this reproof, this mark, this counsel, this comfort, this exhortation, this direction?' Remember as much as you can; but especially the most practical, useful parts. Get it home so deep upon your hearts, that it may not easily slide away. Root it by close application as you go, that affection may constrain you to remember it.

Direct. XIII. Above all, 'Resolve to obey what God shall make known to be his will: take heed lest any wilful sin should escape the power of the word; and should ordinarily go away with you as it came.' Careless hearing and careless living tend most dangerously to a hardened heart, and a forsaken state. If you regard iniquity in your heart, God will not hear your prayers. The sacrifice of the wicked is abominable to him. The foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity. He that turneth away his ear from hearing (that is, obeying) the law, even his prayer is abominable. To the wicked saith God, What hast thou to do to take my covenant into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and hast cast my words behind thee? Obedience is better than sacrifice. He that nameth the name of Christ must depart from iniquity, or else God will not find his mark upon him, nor take him to be one of his. Christ's sheep know his voice and follow him, and to them he will give eternal life. But if you had preached or done miracles in his name, he will say to you, "Depart from me, I know you not," if ye be workers of iniquity. Look therefore to your foot (to your heart and life) when you go to the house of God, and be more ready to hear (his law that must govern you, that you may know his will and do it) than to offer the sacrifice of fools, (that is disobedient sinners,) that think by sacrifices and outside worship to get pardon for an unholy life, and to reconcile God to them in their sins, not knowing that thus they add sin to sin. If you seek God daily, and delight to know his ways, as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinance of their God; if you ask of him the ordinances of justice (sound doctrine, regular worship, strict discipline), and take delight in approaching to God; if you humble your souls with frequent fasts; and yet live in a course of wilful disobedience, you labour in vain, and ag-

gravate your sins, and preachers had need to lift up their voices and be louder trumpets to tell you of your sins, than to other men. But if ye will wash you, and make you clean, and put away the evil of your doings, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, &c. ; you may then come with boldness and confidence unto God. Otherwise to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices ? your oblations will be vain, and your incense abominable. If ye be willing and obedient, you shall be blessed ; but if ye refuse and rebel ye shall be destroyed, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. If you do well shall you not be accepted ? but if ye do evil, sin lieth at the door. Let your profession be never so great, and your parts and expressions never so seraphical, sin is a reproach to any people : and if you would hide yourselves from justice in the purest church, among the holiest people, and the most numerous and longest prayers, be sure that your sin will find you out. Your secret lust, your covetous overreaching, your secret gluttony or tippling, much more your crimson sins will surely find you out.

Alas ! what then will those miscreants do, whose sins are scarlet, bloody persecutions, under pretence of promoting unity, and obedience, and the Catholic church, while the cloak or cover of it is but the thin, transparent spiderweb of human traditions, and numerous ceremonies, and childish complimenting with God ; and when they have nothing but the prayers of a long liturgy, to cover the effects of their earthly, sensual, and diabolical zeal and wisdom (as St. James calls it^b), and to concoct the widows houses which they devour, and to put a reverence upon the office and work, which they labour all the week to render reproachful, by a sensual, luxurious, idle life, and by perfidious making merchandize of souls.

As ever you care what becometh of your souls, take heed lest sin grow bold under prayers, and grow familiar and contemptuous of sermons and holy speeches, and lest you keep a custom of religious exercises and wilful sins. For oh, how doth this harden now, and wound hereafter ! He is the best hearer, that is the holiest liver, and most faithful obeyer.

^b James iii. 15, 16.

Direct. xiv. 'Be not a bare hearer of the prayers of the pastor, whether it be by a liturgy or without.' For that is but hypocrisy, and a sin of omission: you come not thither only to hear prayers, but to pray: and kneeling is not praying; but it is a profession that you pray. And will you be prayerless even in the house of prayer, and when you profess and seem to pray, and so add hypocrisy to impiety? I fear many that seem religious and would have those kept from the sacrament that pray not in their families, do very ordinarily tolerate themselves in this gross omission, and mocking of God, and are prayerless themselves even when they seem to pray.

Direct. xv. 'Stir up your hearts in an especial manner to the greatest alacrity and joy, in speaking and singing the praises of God.' The Lord's day is a day of joy and thanksgiving, and the praises of God are the highest and holiest employment upon earth. And if ever you should do any thing with all your might, and with a joyful and triumphing frame of soul, it is this. Be glad that you may join with the sacred assemblies, in heart and voice, in so heavenly a work. And do not as some humoursome, peevish persons (that know not the danger of that proud disease) fall to quarrelling with David's psalms, as unsuitable to some of the hearers, or to nauseate every failing in the metre, so as to turn so holy a duty into neglect or scorn (for alas! such there are near me where I dwell); nor let prejudice against melody, or church-music (if you dwell where it is used) possess you with a splenetic disgust of that which should be your most joyful work. And if you know how much the incorporate soul must make use of the body in harmony, and in the joyful praises of Jehovah, do not then quarrel with lawful helps, because they are sensible and corporeal.

Direct. xvi. 'Be very considerate and serious in sacramental renewings of your covenant with God^c.' O think what great things you come thither to receive! And think what a holy work you have to do! And think what a life it is that you must promise! So solemn a covenanting with God, and of so great importance, requireth a most holy, reverent, and serious frame of soul. But yet let not the un-

^c See Mr. Rawlet's book of Sacramental Covenanting.

warrantable differencing this ordinance from God's praises and the rest, seduce you into the common errors of the times: I mean, 1. Of those that hence are brought to think that the sacrament should never be received without a preparatory day of humiliation, above the preparation for an ordinary Lord's day's work. 2. And therefore receive it seldom; whereas the primitive churches never spent a Lord's day together without it. 3. Those that turn it into a perplexing terrifying thing, for fear of being unprepared, when it should be their greatest comfort, and when they are not so perplexed about their unpreparedness to any other duty. 4. Those that make so great a difference betwixt this and church-prayers, praises, and other church-worship, as that they take this sacrament only for the proper work and privilege of church-members; and thereupon turn it into an occasion of our great contentions and divisions, while they fly from sacramental communion with others, more than from communion in the other church-worship. O what hath our subtle enemy done against the love, peace, and unity of Christians, especially in England, under pretence of sacramental purity!

Direct. xvii. 'Perform all your worship to God, as in heart-communion with all Christ's churches upon earth; even those that are faulty, though not with their faults.' Though you can be present but with one, yet consent as present in spirit with all, and separate not in heart, from any one, any further than they separate from Christ.

Direct. xviii. 'Accordingly let the interest of the church of Christ be very much upon your heart, and pray as hard for it as for yourself.'

Direct. xix. 'Yea, remember in all, what relation you have to the heavenly society and choir, and think how they worship God in heaven, that you may strive to imitate them in your degree.' Of which more anon.

Direct. xx. 'Let your whole course of life after, savour of a church-frame; live as the servants of that God whom you worship, and as ever before him.' Live in the love of those Christians with whom you have communion, and do not quarrel with them at home; nor despise, nor persecute them with whom you join in the worshipping of God. And do not needlessly open the weaknesses of the minister to

prejudice others against him and the worship. And be not religious at the church alone, for then you are not truly religious at all.

CHAPTER X.

Directions about our Communion with Holy Souls Departed, and now with Christ.

THE oversight and neglect of our duty concerning the souls of the blessed, now with Christ, doth much harden the Papists in their erroneous excesses here about ^a. And if we will ever reduce them, or rightly confute them, it must be by a judicious asserting of the truth, and observing so much with them as is our duty, and commending that in them which is to be commended, and not by running away from truth and duty that we may get far enough from them and error; for error is an ill way of confuting error. The practical truth lieth in these following precepts.

Direct. 1. ‘Remember that the departed souls in heaven are part, and the noblest part of the body of Christ and family of God, of which you are inferior members; and therefore that you owe them greater love and honour, than you owe to any saints on earth.’ “The whole family in heaven and earth is named of Christ ^b.” Those are the happiest and noblest parts, that are most pure and perfect, and dwell in the highest and most glorious habitations, nearest unto Christ, yea, with him. If holiness be lovely, the most holy are the most lovely: we have many obligations therefore, to love them more than the saints on earth: they are more excellent and amiable, and Christ loveth them more. And if any be honourable, it must especially be those spirits that are of greatest excellencies and perfections, and advanced to the greatest glory and nearness to their Lord. Make conscience therefore of this as your duty, not only to love and honour blessed souls, but to love and honour them more than those that are yet on earth. And as every duty is attended with benefit, so we shall find this exceeding

^a I have said more of this since in my “Life of Faith.”

^b Ephes. iii. 15.