

THE  
**CHURCH OF ROME**

**NO SAFE GUIDE :**

OR,

REASONS TO PROVE THAT NO RATIONAL MAN,  
WHO TAKES DUE CARE OF HIS OWN ETERNAL SALVATION, CAN GIVE  
HIMSELF UP UNTO THE CONDUCT  
OF THAT CHURCH IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

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Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord,  
The temple of the Lord are these. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery,  
and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom  
ye know not ; and come and stand before me in this house which is called by my  
name?—JER. vii. 4. 9, 10.

BY  
**JOHN OWEN**

IMPRIMATUR,

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE ensuing discourse was the subject and substance of two sermons preached unto a private congregation. The author of them had no design or purpose ever to have made them public. The importunity of many, who judged they might be of use unto others, because they found them so unto themselves, gave occasion unto this publication of them. Yet had they not so prevailed, but that he judged it was neither unmeet for him, nor unseasonable for others. ‘In publico discrimine omnis homo miles est.’ No man is to be forbidden to bring his bucket to help allay the flames of a raging fire. And it is the pretence of the church of Rome to be the only guide of all Christians in religion, which is here examined; a work which a concurrence of all sorts of circumstances renders seasonable. For as this pretence is the sole foundation of the whole papacy, with all the power and secular advantages that it hath obtained unto itself; so it is that alone which gives countenance and warranty unto the factors and agents of that church, to design and perpetrate such things as are destructive of all that is praiseworthy or desirable among mankind, and unspeakably scandalous unto Christian religion: remove the sand or rubbish hereof, and the whole fabric will dissolve of itself, and fall to the ground. This small discourse is an attempt unto that end, whose success is humbly recommended unto the care of God over his church. If there seem to be any severities of expression used towards some of the church of Rome, the reader is to consider that hard things cannot well be

represented in soft and pliant words. And if there be nothing of this nature found, but what hath the appearance of severity, from the things themselves which are expressed, there is no blameable excess. However, the author is one who heartily desires and prays for the outward peace and tranquillity of all men in this world, whose principles will allow them to live peaceably with others.

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THE foundation of the small ensuing discourse, shall be laid in a position, wherein, as I suppose, persons of all sorts who are concerned in the things treated about, are agreed; namely, That it is the duty of every man who taketh care of his own eternal salvation, to betake himself into some guide or conduct, that may safely lead him unto the knowledge of the truth, and the practice of Christian obedience. The nature of religion, the state of our own minds in this world, with the eternal importance of a safe unerring guidance in things spiritual and supernatural, do require that the utmost of our diligence and prudence, be used in the discharge of this duty, in the choice of this guide. No man of himself is sufficient by his own reason alone to be his own guide. They who thinking themselves wise have attempted so to be, 'have waxed vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts have been darkened;' Rom. i. 21. The warning and instruction given by Solomon, do principally respect this case; 'he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; but whoso walketh wisely shall be delivered;' Prov. xxviii. 26. But the knowledge of, and adherence unto, such a guide, are eminently necessary, when there are great differences and divisions amongst men about religion; especially if they are managed in ways and by means not only scandalous unto religion itself, but pernicious unto human society in their consequence. When men not only say and contend that 'Here is Christ, and lo, there is Christ,' Matt. xxiv. 23. but also on the account of these differences engage into ways and practices, ruinous unto the souls of men and destructive unto all that is praiseworthy in this world, those who are not careful to

choose and adhere unto a faithful guide and conduct, are no less defective in wisdom, than negligent in their duty.

Were a man in a wilderness where are a multitude of cross paths, all pretending to lead unto an inhabited city, whither he must go or perish; if he see men not only contending some for one way, some for another, but killing and destroying one another, about the preference of the several ways they esteem best and safest; he deserves to wander and perish, if he refuse a guide that is tendered unto him with sufficient evidence of his truth and faithfulness. That there is such a one ready in our present case shall be immediately evinced.

The differences in religion that are at present among us, are of two sorts. First, Such as comparatively are of small moment, as unto the principal ends of the life of God. The measure of these differences is, that which way soever they are determined in the minds of men, they neither overthrow the foundation, nor obstruct the due exercise of faith and love. For this is our great duty with respect unto doctrines in religion, that we 'hold fast the form of sound words, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus;' 2 Tim. i. 13. And if any of them are so small as that it cannot be pretended that they overthrow the foundations of faith and love, yet if they hinder them in their operations and due exercise according unto the rule of the gospel, they are pernicious unto the souls of them in whom they have that effect. But such differences which comply with this measure, tend unto nothing in themselves that is obstructive unto the glory or power of religion, whatever they may be pressed and wrested unto, by the lusts, prejudices, and carnal interests of men. For there is no ground to be taken from them, for severe thoughts concerning the state and condition of them who so differ, as unto their interest in present grace and future glory. To live in a neglect of love, in all the effects and fruits of it towards such on any pretences, to design their hurt and evil, is to live in open contradiction unto all the rules of the gospel.

Such severe thoughts are the principal causes and occasion of all pernicious evils in religion; especially those which are most scandalous unto it, and most inconsistent

with that good of mankind, which Christian religion is designed to promote. For things are come to that pass among the generality of Christians, that when once persons begin to damn others in their minds for their dissent from them, they judge themselves at liberty, and count that it is their duty to do them all the mischief they can in this world. They first make themselves their judges that they must go to hell, and then would be their executioners, to send them thither as fast as they can. Whether this be a representation of Christ or of the devil, is not hard to determine. Sure I am, it is not compliant with the advice given unto all guides of the church, of an attendance whereunto they must give an account; 2 Tim. ii. 24—26. ‘And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.’

Hence it is that those who have a strong inclination to oppress and destroy other men, which their interest prompts them unto, do endeavour to make every the least dissent from themselves, on one pretence or other, by sophistical arguments and strained consequences, to be a fundamental error, and such as makes them incapable of life eternal. But no men can give a greater evidence of their disinterest in Christian religion, of their unacquaintedness with the virtues and powers of it, wherein the glories of it do consist, and what is of real price with God, than those who are so minded. Blessed be God, that Christ will not leave his seat of judgment unto such persons, neither here nor hereafter.

But such differences as those mentioned, will probably continue among Christians, so long as they continue in this world. For although all those among whom these differences are, do choose the same guide, yet they do not in all things equally hear and understand his voice. Perfection in light and knowledge are required unto a perfect agreement in all the conceptions of our minds about spiritual things. Wherefore it is reserved for heaven, where every thing that is imperfect shall be done away. Here we have

different measures; 'we know but in part,' and therefore 'prophesy in part;' Rom. xiii. 9. It is love or charity alone that supplies this defect; and gives such a harmony unto the different parts of the mystical body of Christ, which is the church, as renders them all useful, and the whole beautiful; 1 Cor. xiii. Col. iii. 14.

But these are not the differences which at present I intend. There are those which in their nature are of greater importance; such as are about the fundamentals of Christian faith, worship, and obedience; such as upon whose determination the eternal welfare and misery of the souls of men do depend. And not only so, but they are such also, which on that wretched management of religious concerns that late ages have embraced, have an influence into the peace or disturbance of human society, the tranquillity, the liberty, and lives of men. Yea, they are by some promoted and pursued by all ways of fraud and violence, with that height of impiety as is utterly destructive of all religion. Many we have who plead themselves to be Christians, which might be allowed them, if they pleased themselves, would they not do such things as Christian religion abhorreth. But this is the least part of their claim; they will also be the only Christians; all others who differ from them, however falsely so called, being only a drove of unbelievers, hasting unto hell. Now although this be intolerable presumption, yet because they hurt none by it but themselves, if they will not be awakened from this pleasing dream, they may be suffered to sleep on. But they rest not here; these Christians who only are so, and so alone know truly what is in Christian religion, will do such things under a pretence of it, will perpetrate such execrable crimes, avowing them to be the dictates and commands of that religion, that if men were not sure that their former pretences are presumptuously false, it would be a sufficient warranty for them, whereon to question the whole truth of the gospel. And these things are done in the pursuit of these differences in religion which abound among us. Wherefore if we would not contribute unto that intolerable scandal against the gospel, that the religion it teacheth is pernicious to the peace of mankind, and all that is praiseworthy in the world, which must be accounted for; if we have any care about

our own eternal salvation, we ought to use our utmost diligence to arrive unto a safe conduct through all these difficulties.

This being our present case, there being such differences in, and divisions about, religion among us; the management of them being grown incurably scandalous and perilous; our inquiry is, what guide or conduct a man that takes care of his own salvation, that would know the truth, and have the benefit of it, that would please God here, and come unto the eternal enjoyment of him hereafter, ought to betake himself and firmly adhere unto, as that which will safely lead and direct him unto all these ends. 'For if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch.'

Two things are pleaded to be this safe and infallible guide, to have that conduct committed unto them, which every one who takes care of his salvation is obliged to betake himself unto.

The first is the church of Rome. She it is who, at this time, lays a most vehement claim to be the only authoritative infallible guide of all Christians, as unto their faith, worship, and obedience. We inquire not after a ministerial guide, and the benefit which we may receive thereby. This they regard not, as that which leaves men the exercise of their own understandings, and use of all divine aids and assistances, as unto the information, direction, and determination of their minds in all that they are to believe and practise in religion. But such a guidance as whereunto, by virtue of its authority and infallibility, we are entirely and absolutely to resign our understandings and consciences, whatever it leads us unto, is that which this church claimeth and without which she is nothing, nor can stand one moment. This is that which those who plead the cause of that church at present, do wholly betake themselves unto the promotion of, declining what lies in them, all other differences and controversies between them and us. Such a guide, they say, there must be of all Christians, and this guide is their church. And they do wisely consult their own interest therein; for if they can once gain this point, all other things which they aim at will follow of their own accord; and they may satisfy the desires of their hearts on the consciences of men.

Wherefore this claim of theirs consists of these three parts, or may be reduced unto these three heads :

1. That they, and they alone, are the church of Christ ; all others who are called Christians in the world, are heretics and schismatics, who belong not unto it, nor have any interest in it. Howbeit if the description given us of the church of Christ in the Scripture be right and good, it is almost impossible there should be any society or combination of men on a religious account, more unlike it than that which is called the church of Rome. This therefore must be taken upon their own credit, and vehement affirmation, by them who have a mind so to do.

2. That this church, which they alone are, is intrusted with authority over the souls and consciences of all Christians, and all that would be so, to be their only guide in all that they are to know, believe, and do in religion ; so that whoever gives not themselves up unto their conduct, must perish eternally. It were no hard task to manifest, that a supposition hereof is destructive unto the nature of evangelical faith and obedience, as also of all the directions and precepts given by Christ and his apostles for the discharge of our duty with respect unto them. But this they must obtain, or the whole present papal interest falls unto the ground. Yet neither will a supposition that there is such a church, secure them ; their own pretences to be this church being openly contradictory to the Scripture. Nor is the power claimed herein derived from the apostles, who professed themselves not to be lords of the faith of believers ; 2 Cor. i. 24. 1 Pet. v. 3.

3. They plead that hereon, no more is required of any man who takes care of his salvation, but that he give up himself absolutely and entirely unto the conduct of their church, believing what it proposeth, and that on this ground alone, that it is proposed by it, and obeying all its commands ; whereby they seem to set this pretended guide in ' the temple of God, shewing him that he is God.'

This is the claim of the church of Rome ; these are the principles whereinto it is resolved, which whether they have any thing in them of truth or modesty, will immediately be made to appear.

Secondly, The holy Scripture, with the divine aids and

assistances for the understanding thereof, which God hath promised unto all that diligently seek him, is pleaded to be the only rule and guide that men ought to betake themselves unto, in case of those important differences in religion, which are under consideration. And the plea on the behalf thereof is reducible unto these five heads :

1. That this Scripture is a divine supernatural revelation of God, his mind and his will. This foundation is unquestionable, and will never fail them that build upon it. Those of the Roman religion will propose ensnaring questions about it, unto them on whom they design. They will be asking, how they know the Scripture to be the word of God, labouring to disprove the evidences they produce to prove it so to be. But this bold artifice is of no use in this case ; for themselves confess it so to be ; only they prefer the authority of their church testifying it so to be, as more safely to be rested in and trusted unto, than that of God himself, which cannot be unto the advantage of their cause, with any considerate persons.

2. That it is a divine revelation of the whole mind and will of God, as unto all things that are necessary unto his glory and our salvation. This it frequently testifieth of itself ; and on the former supposition of its being such a divine revelation, its testimony must be granted to be infallibly true. Both these assertions the apostle expressly conjoineth, 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. Somewhat they except here in respect of their unwritten traditions, but dare not positively deny that the Scripture is a sufficient revelation of all things absolutely necessary unto salvation. Indeed to do so will leave no assurance unto any man that he can ever know what is necessary unto salvation. But they have a reserve whereunto they betake themselves on a concession hereof ; namely, that whatever be contained in it, it cannot be understood, but as the sense of it is declared by their church. But this is a bold unproved presumption, contrary unto the design of God in giving us his word, and the experience of all who have been exercised in it.

3. The way, manner, and method of this revelation are such as are suited unto divine wisdom and goodness, whether they please men or no. It is with reference unto these things that they expatiate and enlarge themselves, in charg-

ing the Scripture with obscurity, and unfitness thereon to be our only rule and guide. For the Bible, they say, is a book composed of histories, prophecies, songs, prayers, and epistles, and is therefore unmeet for any such use or end. But these things are of no consideration in our present case. It is thus given out immediately by God himself; and therefore every way answers divine wisdom and goodness; whether men are pleased with it or no, we are not at all concerned. He who designed it for the instruction of the church, alone knows what was to be the method of its composition unto that end. And it hath been proved on another occasion, that considering the state of the church in its several ages, the nature of that faith which is to be wrought and confirmed by this divine revelation, with the manner of teaching becoming the authority of God; and the holy Scripture could not have been given out unto us in any other order or method, than that wherein it is disposed.

4. On these suppositions, there neither is, nor can be more required of us in order unto our eternal salvation, but that we understand aright, firmly believe, and yield obedience unto the revelation of the mind and will of God that is made therein. The assurance hereof is so evidently included in the foregoing assertions, that it needs no confirmation. Every thought unto the contrary, is so injurious unto the wisdom, goodness, grace, and truth of God, so opposite unto all the notions of the minds of men, on a supposition of God's speaking unto them, that it ought to be rejected with detestation.

5. There are efficacious aids promised, and assured means appointed by God himself to help all that diligently seek him, unto a certain infallible understanding of his mind in the Scripture, so far as the knowledge of it is necessary unto our salvation. This also I have lately confirmed in a peculiar discourse. These are the heads whereunto the plea for the guidance of the Scripture in all differences and divisions about religion, may be reduced.

The case being thus plainly stated, the inquiry hereon is, whether of these guides, a man that takes care of his own eternal salvation should betake himself, and firmly adhere unto, to the end.

In answer unto this inquiry, I shall prove, that no wise

man who feareth God, and is careful of the eternal condition of his own soul, can choose the church of Rome for this guide, foregoing the other of the Scripture, with the divine aids promised and given for the understanding thereof.

The person of whom I speak I suppose to be a wise man; that is, one who prefers things eternal unto those that are temporal, so as not to be ensnared by earthly interests and advantages, unto the forfeiture of his interest in things above; and will be careful not to be imposed on by men who design their own advantage in what they would persuade him unto. He who is otherwise minded is a fool. He is also one that feareth God, and therefore is real and in good earnest in religion, as desiring to please him in all things. For there are many who give the world no small disturbance about religious concerns, who do on all occasions manifest that they have little or no regard unto God in what they say or do. But in the persons whom I address unto, I suppose that they really take care above all other things of the eternal salvation of their souls. And I shall not deal with them by abstruse arguments, nor by testimonies of men that may be bandied up and down, on the one side and the other; but by such plain reasonings as are accommodated unto the common understanding of all sober, sedate, rational persons, who own the principles of Christian religion, which have their force from the general usage of mankind in things of an alike nature, the common natural principles of men's minds, where they are not vitiated and depraved, with the experience of what they have found already in any duties of religious worship. Indeed if we could but prevail with men to be persuaded that every man must believe for himself, and obey for himself, and give an account for himself, this difference would be at an end. For the choice of the church of Rome to be the guide inquired after, is nothing but the putting of the care of saving our souls unto others, who will not be able to answer for us when our trial shall come.

And this subject in particular I have chosen at present to insist upon for two reasons.

1. Because, as was before observed, those who at present do plead the interest of this church among us, do decline what they can all particular controversies, and under various

notions betake themselves to this alone, about an authoritative guide and leader of all Christians, which they pretend their church to be. They do not, in their projection for proselytes, go to them and enter into disputes about transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the mass, adoration of images, or the like, no, nor yet about the pope's infallibility. But supposing themselves to be greatly advantaged by the differences in religion that are among us, which usually they enlarge upon without either truth or modesty, under a concealment of greater differences among themselves, they insist only on the necessity of such a guide which they pretend their church alone to be. Hereby have they prevailed on many, who on one account or other, do think themselves unmeet any longer to take care of their own salvation. And when once they have prevailed herein, there is nothing so horrid, nothing so wicked, that they cannot impose on the consciences of their proselytes. They will not now scruple or stick at all, at those things which they would have dreaded to have thought of, whilst they had the care of themselves in any measure upon them. Not one man of a thousand who supposeth that he hath himself and his own soul in charge, that he must give an account of and for himself, will venture on those ways and practices which they will with great satisfaction rush into, under their conduct.

2. Because of the strange ways they have lately taken, to put this pretence into use and practice, and to take us all under their conduct. Pretending unto the guidance of our souls in the things of God, they have attempted to take us into their power as unto our lives, liberties, laws, and all other our concernments in this world, which whosoever doth unlawfully, forfeits all his own. And a sufficient indication it is of what guidance we were like to meet withal, when way was to be made unto it, by fire, confusion, blood, massacres, and sedition.

Should there be a school erected, pretending unto an easy certain way of teaching all sciences, divine and human, should it pretend a grant that nothing of this nature should be taught or learned but in and by it; yet, if I saw the posts of the house hung like shambles with the limbs of slaughtered persons; if the ground about it be strewed with the bones and ashes of men burned to death; here lying one

strangled, there another stabbed, a third poisoned ; all for no other cause, but either because they would not submit to the teaching thereof, or would not learn things foolish and wicked, I should avoid such a school and its power so far as I were able. But yet because there hath of late among us a great accession been made really unto this guidance by persons formerly professing the Protestant religion, I shall a little inquire into the causes of it, or the means whereby it hath been brought about. And I shall not fear to say, that as unto the most of them who have relinquished the Protestant religion, they are these that follow.

1. A profound ignorance of the internal powers of religion, with an utter want of all experience of them in themselves, makes them an easy prey to seducers. Persons who have never had any concernment in religion beyond the outside solemnity of it, with some notions and opinions about the doctrines of it, are easily ‘tossed to and fro,’ from one religion unto another, or unto none at all, through the ‘cunning sleights of men who lie in wait to deceive.’

When men have only a ‘form of godliness’ in the profession of the truth, but know nothing of the ‘power of it,’ it is an uncertain accident whether they persevere in that profession or no. There are internal powers of true religion which are efficacious on the minds of men, to enlighten them, to purify them, and give them liberty from the adverse powers of darkness, vanity, and bondage unto sin. Where men have experience of them in their own hearts, there and there alone, if a vigorous impression unto the contrary do befall them, will they be constant in the profession of the truth. The success of our Roman emissaries is confined almost unto that sort of persons, who under the outward profession of the Protestant religion, have been totally ignorant of the virtue and power of the truth contained therein.

2. Wickedness of life, taking shelter in the promises of eternal security, which that church with presumptuous confidence tenders unto all that will give up themselves unto her conduct, though in the last moment of their lives, gains them a multitude of proselytes. This engine they apply unto many when they are leaving the world, even unto such as having lived in sin and ignorance, are ready to receive condign punishment for their villanies, deceiving them of those

few minutes which might be improved in seeking after evangelical faith and repentance. But this is the least use they make of it. There are in the world, among those that are called Protestants, mighty men, nobles, men of dignity and revenue, who live in their sins, and are resolved so to do. Yet are they not able by any means to secure their consciences from troublesome fears of eternal miseries that will ensue on the course wherein they are. By all crafty ways of access and compliance, the factors of this church do insinuate themselves, or by others are introduced into the acquaintance of this sort of persons. And the first thing they offer unto them, is absolute security of eternal salvation, if they will but relinquish heresy, wherein it is impossible they should ever be saved, and betake themselves unto the conduct of the church of Rome; of the change of their lives, the relinquishment of their sins, of repentance from dead works, of the life of God, and universal obedience therein, there are no words between them. Many of these persons who are resolved beforehand rather to part with all the religion in the world, than with one of their lusts and sins, do readily embrace the composition offered. For really that which is tendered unto them is a consistency between living in sin, and assured going unto heaven, which before they knew not that they could be reconciled. For however they shall live for the future, suppose in the sins of adultery, fornication, profane swearing, luxury, drunkenness, or the like, the church will take care that by confessions, masses, and purgatory, they shall be undoubtedly saved. At this door have entered great numbers of unclean beasts unto the increase of the herd, who often prove the most forward zealots for the Catholic cause.

3. Secular interests and advantages, accommodated unto all sorts of persons, are another means of their prevalency. There are no sorts of persons from the highest to the lowest, that come within their walk and compass, or unto whom they can have access, with the least probability of success, unto whom they have not in a readiness to propose some secular advantages, suited unto their state, condition, inclinations, and abilities. Great men shall have favour and correspondences with potentates abroad, besides a principal interest in that alteration in national affairs, which they doubt

not but they shall introduce. Scholars shall be used and preferred, at least when they have any eminency in abilities, they shall not want esteem and advancement. Mechanics shall be employed, and the poorest one way or other provided for. And for all sorts of discontented persons, who may be of any use unto their interest, they have the refuge of their monasteries, for their entertainment. And is it any wonder, if in this degenerate age, wherein the most of men do openly and visibly declare a predominancy in their minds and affections of things carnal and temporal, above those that are spiritual and eternal, many be ensnared by these promises, which either shall be made good unto them, or at least are sufficient to keep them in expectation, until they are engaged beyond recovery?

4. Many, it is to be feared, fall under the dreadful account given of God's righteous dealings with those who obstinately live in sin, under the profession of the truth, 2 Thess. ii. 10—12. 'Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.' This is that which we have more cause to fear with respect unto this nation, than all the artifices of the Roman church.

Lastly, how powerful and prevalent the last voice of this church may prove I know not. The motto of some potentates on their great guns, is 'Vox ultima regum;' 'the last voice of kings;' that of this church is fire and fagot; where-with I pray and hope that they shall never more be heard to speak in England.

Allowing them these advantages, I shall now prove that no wise or sober man, who takes care of his own salvation, can give up himself to the conduct of the church of Rome, in his choice of religion, then when there are the most abounding contests about the truth, and the right way of its profession, which is supposed our present case.

In my first reason I shall proceed no farther but to render this pretended guide suspected with all wise and sober men. For it will be granted, I suppose, that we ought thoroughly to consider who or what that guide is, whereunto we do ab-

solutely resign the disposal of all our spiritual concernments, without power of revocation.

If any men were to make such an absolute trust of their lives, estates, and liberties, into the hand of another man or of other men, putting them all absolutely out of their own power, certainly they would think it their wisdom and interest to consider aright how and what they are, unto whom they do so fully and absolutely resign themselves, and all that they have. And if they have any just suspicion of their honesty or faithfulness, or that they seek themselves or their own advantage in taking this trust upon them, they will not easily be induced to resign up their all unto them. Yea, the more earnest they are to persuade them, the more will they suspect that there is knavery in the cause. How much more careful ought we to be in the choosing a guide into whose power and disposal we must resign all the eternal concernments of our souls; which all men do, who absolutely give up the conduct of themselves unto the church of Rome in all matters of religion. For notwithstanding all their pleas of a sure and safe bank for the consciences of men, there are great presumptions that they will break at last, and leave them who have intrusted them unto eternal beggary.

I shall give but one reason, which renders this pretended guide so justly suspected, as that no wise man can commit himself thereunto in things of this importance.

And this is, the prodigious worldly secular advantages which the church of Rome hath made unto itself by this pretence of being the only guide of all Christians in matters of religion. For this pretence is the sole foundation of the whole papacy; which when the sand of it is removed, must fall to the ground. And we may consider both what they have obtained by it, and how they use their acquisition. For, 1. By virtue of this pretence alone, they have erected their popedom, obtained principalities and sovereignties, possessed themselves of the principal revenues of most nations of Europe, have heaped up huge treasures of wealth, wherewith they maintain innumerable persons who have nothing to do, but by all arts to promote their interest, especially that numerous society which is grown at this day the pest and terror of the world. These things are evident

in other nations, they were so formerly in this ; and in all the zeal which of late they have pretended for the conversion, as they call it, of this nation, it is legibly written in all the parts of their design, and the whole management of it, that it was power, dominion, wealth, and revenue unto themselves that they intended ; this place, that dignity, and the other revenue, and the carnally sweet dominion over the consciences of all sorts of persons were in their eye.

2. We may consider what use they make of these secular advantages and revenues which they have obtained merely by virtue of this pretence. And it may be said with modesty, that these things were never forced to be wickedly serviceable unto the lusts of men, among the heathens themselves, more than they are and have been among all sorts of men, in the church of Rome. Ambition, avarice, pride, luxury, sensuality, cruelty, are the deities that they sacrifice the spoils of the souls and consciences of men unto. There is no sort of wickedness, not the highest and most provoking, not the most vile and sordid that human nature is capable of, but multiplied instances may be given of the perpetration of them, by the advantage which they make of this pretence.

This consideration, I say, is sufficient unto all wise men to render this pretended guide justly suspected ; and to bring the vagabond unto the strictest and severest examination that the law and word of God doth direct unto in such cases.

1. It is so on the account of reason and common usage amongst men in cases of an alike nature. If it be notoriously known and evident, that any sort of persons, whatever else they seem to be or act, do make great and unaccountable advantages unto themselves by any trusts that are committed unto them, pretending nothing in the mean time but the good of them who so intrust them ; a wise man will not absolutely give up the disposal of himself and all his concerns unto such persons. Yea, when men are more than ordinarily urgent to have such trusts committed unto them, we do ordinarily inquire what is their interest in this matter of care and trouble that makes them so earnest. And if we find that they have made their own advantages on all such occasions, we shall not be too forward to give up unto

them all that we have ; especially if the resignation of ourselves and our concerns desired by them, be such as we shall never more have the disposal of any thing in our own power, nor shall they be accountable for any thing they do thereon. It may be you will say, those who desire this great trust to be reposed in them, are in all other things of virtue and piety, most eminent above others. But what if by various ways and means they discover themselves to be for the most part of the very worst of men ? It will assuredly be said, that such a kind of trust as that mentioned, would be ridiculous, and was never made by any wise man ; fools and madmen being only meet to be confined unto it.

Yet such is the trust that the church of Rome requireth that we should commit unto her, and that in affairs of infinitely greater importance than all other earthly concerns. For she would have us absolutely resign up our souls and consciences, with all our eternal interests, unto her conduct and guidance, without any reservation for the use of our own light, reason, knowledge, or faith, and without power of revocation, on pain of damnation. In the mean time it is evident and notorious, that by virtue of this pretence, she hath erected the popedom, obtained principalities and dominion, endowed herself with the principal revenues of the nations, and erected a supremacy over kings and kingdoms to be disposed of at their pleasure. Is it not the duty of a wise man when any of these persons are importunate with him to forsake the Scripture, and his own understanding, with all the experience which ever he had of the power of religion, and to give up himself absolutely unto their conduct ; to inquire what is the interest of these men in these things, which makes them thus importunate ?

And if this appear openly to be an increase or confirmation of their secular advantages, he will say that this is a trust fit only for them to make, whom darkness, ignorance, the love of sin, and a vicious conversation have rendered spiritual fools and bedlams, that can in nothing guide themselves. Especially he will do so, when he shall find that these high pretenders to be the only guides of the souls and consciences of other men, do for the most part walk in paths themselves that go down to the chambers of death. That they are so far from giving examples of Christian

meekness, humility, self-denial, faith, love, or real holiness ; from giving a just representation of Christ in the image of God on themselves ; as that in many great, notable, prodigious instances they represent the devil, with all his malice, cruelty, and blood, unto the world.

2. There is that which doth hereon, yet farther increase a just suspicion of this pretended guide. And this is the way of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of his apostles under him and after him, unto whom that conduct of our souls which the pope and church of Rome do now lay claim unto, was really committed by God even the Father. It is known that our Lord Jesus Christ himself, though in his divine person he was the sovereign possessor of heaven and earth, yet in that ministry wherein he took the guidance of men's souls, he obtained nothing, possessed nothing beyond food and raiment, nor made the least outward advantage by any good that he did, or by any miracles that he wrought. This state in general belonged unto his humiliation, and was a part of his sufferings. But withal it was chosen by himself for this end, to convince and satisfy the souls of men, that he designed nothing in all his instruction and guidance of them, but the glory of God in their eternal welfare ; gaining nothing unto himself but reproaches, persecution, and the cross. This he did as knowing that there was that glory, beauty, power, and usefulness in the truth wherein he instructed men, that nothing was outwardly needful to give it an effectual entrance into their minds, but only to deliver them from prejudices, which all self-advantages made by him would have given unto them. The pope and Mahomet, who have since pretended unto the same conduct of men's minds in religion, which was intrusted originally with him whom the Father sealed, knowing that what they had to teach of their own, and to lead men into, had no glory, beauty, evidence, nor use in itself, have wisely betaken themselves unto the ways of fraud and force, to impose their doctrine on the consciences of men, with this bait and allure-ment, that what profit and advantage they make unto themselves, by the conduct which they have assumed, others according to their proportion shall be sharers therein.

The holy apostles succeeded unto the personal ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, as unto this conduct of the souls

of men. Such power was committed unto them, by him, who sent them 'even as the Father sent him;' such assurance was there in their conduct, through infallible inspiration, and the presence of the Holy Ghost with them in an extraordinary manner, as that all men were bound to give up themselves unto their conduct and guidance. Howbeit they judged that there was no duty more incumbent on them, than to make it evident unto all the world, that they neither sought nor would accept of any temporal advantages unto themselves by the trust reposed in them; but were contented that their portion in this world should lie in all the extremities and calamities of it. And this they willingly submitted unto, that all men might be encouraged to trust them in their everlasting affairs, when they saw what losers they were by it in this world, without desire, hope, or expectation of any better condition.

The church of Rome lays claim to the very same authority over, and conduct of the consciences of men in religion, as were committed unto Jesus Christ and his apostles. It is as safe, as they pretend, for a man to cast off the authority and institutions of Christ himself, as to dissent from those of the pope. But what, in the mean time, meaneth this bleating of the sheep and lowing of the oxen? whence is it that they have managed the pretence hereof, to the gaining of power, dominion, wealth, and revenues unto themselves, beyond that of the greatest kings and princes in this world? Let others do as they shall think fit, I shall never commit the conduct of my soul unto them, who for aught I know would never look after me, nor any other, were it not for the advantage they make by it unto the service of their earthly desires.

It may be said, that other churches and persons do make advantages unto themselves by that conduct of the souls of men which they lay claim unto; and if this be sufficient to render such guides suspected, we shall scatter the churches, and leave none to guide them. I answer, It doth no way follow. For the rules, measures, and outward allowances for and in the name of their labour and guidance unto the ministers of the gospel, are in general so stated in the Scripture, as that men cannot mistake therein unto their prejudice. But we are not at all concerned in what advantages

men make unto themselves hereby ; provided that the conduct they pretend unto, be such as is accompanied with no dominion over our faith, but is proposed only as a help thereunto. Whilst men require not an absolute resignation of our souls and consciences unto them, but leave us unto the perfect liberty of our own minds, to judge upon and receive what they propose unto us ; to examine and try all that they instruct us in, which we may reject or refuse, according as it evidenceth itself to be good or evil unto us ; there is no great danger in our conduct.

This, I say, is sufficient to render this pretended guide which with so much vehement importunity would impose itself upon us, to be so justly suspected, unto all men not forsaken as well of common reason, as of all due reverence unto the word of God, as that they will not readily embrace it.

Secondly, As what hath been spoken is sufficient to render this pretended guide suspected with all sober and considerate persons ; so there are cogent reasons, why it ought to be absolutely rejected, by all who take care of their own eternal salvation. The cause peculiarly under consideration is stated on a double supposition.

1. That there are such differences in and about religion among us, as wherein the eternal salvation of the souls of men are immediately concerned. For some of them consist in opinions, principles, and practices, pernicious and destructive unto salvation, as each side doth acknowledge and contend. And it is meet the cause at present should be expressly stated on this supposition, because those of the Roman church design their great advantage from it.

2. That in this case we ought diligently to apply ourselves unto some safe guide which may lead and conduct us in the right way, wherein we may glorify God, and obtain eternal blessedness unto our own souls. This also is not only allowed by them, but fiercely contended for, as a foundation of their whole cause. Wherefore to determine our thoughts aright in our inquiry on these suppositions, we may consider the things that follow.

1. The first supposition is plainly stated in the Scripture. It is plainly affirmed therein that such things were then beginning in the church, that they would fall out in

after-ages, and increase towards the end and consummation of all things. See to this purpose, Acts xx. 29, 30. 1 Tim. iv. 1—3. 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4. 2 Pet. ii. 1. 3. 1 John iv. 1—3. all in compliance with the holy warnings and predictions of our blessed Saviour himself unto the same purpose, Matt. xxiv. 4, 5. 11. 23—26. In all these places, and many other, the cause as stated in our supposition is expressly foretold, with the pernicious effects of opinions and heresies, overthrowing the foundation of faith, and destroying the souls of men. In this cause is a certain guide necessary in a peculiar manner.

2. In no one place, either in express words, or by direct consequence, are believers or the disciples of Christ, directed in this case to betake themselves unto such a guidance of the church of Rome. They are not so in any one place where these divisions are foretold, where properly such directions should be expected or nowhere; nor yet in any other place whatever. Any one divine testimony unto this purpose, giving this direction on that supposition, shall for ever determine this controversy.

Shall we think that the Lord Jesus Christ, foreknowing, foretelling, and warning all his disciples of such a dangerous state and condition, as from which they cannot escape or be delivered, without a guide that will safely lead and conduct them, if there were but one such guide prepared and appointed by him, should nowhere in any divine revelation direct them thereunto? Doth a supposition hereof truly represent unto us his love, care, and compassion towards the church? Can any thing more injurious unto his wisdom, faithfulness, and honour, be once imagined? It is impossible therefore that any man in the case supposed, should betake himself unto the sole conduct of the pope or church of Rome, without casting contempt on him and his authority. But,

3. Yet there is farther evidence of his mind herein, in that we are expressly in this case directed unto another guide, without any mention of the church of Rome, which is utterly exclusive of this pretence. For, (1.) All believers are commanded themselves to examine and try all false teachers, prophets, and spirits that are not of God, doctrines subverting the faith, and endangering the souls of men; which is utterly inconsistent with that absolute universal resignation of themselves unto the guidance of the

church of Rome, which is claimed by it. See 1 John iv. 1—3. (2.) They are directed unto the way, means, and rule whereby they must make this trial, and come unto the final determination in their own minds, Isa. viii. 20. 2 Pet. i. 19. 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. And this also is diametrically opposite unto that resignation of themselves unto the church of Rome, which it requireth of them. (3.) They have a guide promised unto them, to give them an understanding of the rule in the discharge of this duty, and to enable them to make a right and safe determination thereon, John xvi. 13. 1 John ii. 26, 27. These things are consistent with a ministerial guide, such as is found in all true churches, wherein none pretend to be lords of our faith, but only helpers of our joy. But with a supreme authoritative guide requiring an absolute resignation of our understandings and consciences unto itself, they are altogether inconsistent.

This is the substance of our case, and this is the determination of it given us by the Holy Ghost. Diversities and divisions in principles, opinions, and practices in religion, are supposed, unto as great a height as they can be at, at this day in the world. Teachers ‘speaking perverse things; departures from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; teachers not enduring sound doctrine; turning away men’s ears from the truth, and turning them unto fables; false teachers, bringing in damnable heresies, denying the Lord that bought them, many following their pernicious ways; spirits of false prophets going out in the world, the spirit of antichrist.’ These things, I say, are all supposed and foretold in the Scripture. In this case and state of things, that we be not seduced, that our souls be not ruined, we are commanded ourselves to try and examine all those who teach such things, whether they be of God or no; and by the Scripture we are to try them if we intend not to be deceived and undone for ever. Unto the right understanding hereof a sure and faithful guide is promised unto us, to lead us unto all truth; so that no concernment of religion is more plainly stated, and as unto our duty, more expressly determined in the Scripture than this is.

It is so in a peculiar manner, in the First Epistle of John the apostle. Before the end of his days, divisions, errors, heresies, began to abound in Christian religion. This he

fully testifieth, chap. iv. 1—4. and 2 Epist. 7. According unto his duty he writes unto believers to warn them of their danger, with reference unto them that seduced them, or attempted so to do, 1 Epist. chap. ii. 26. And he writes unto this purpose unto 'fathers, young men, and children,' or professed believers of all sorts, degrees, and endowments, ver. 12, 13. and this not because 'they did not know the truth, but because they did know it,' and had experience of its power, ver. 21. But in all the directions he gives them for the discharge of their duty, so as that they might escape the dangers they were exposed unto; there is not any one word, any intimation that they should betake themselves unto the guidance of this, or that, or any church, much less that which is called the church of Rome. But the sum of his direction is, that they should rely on the unction they had received from the Holy One, or the aids and supplies of the Spirit of God, to understand the Scripture in the examination and trial they were to make of all these things; chap. ii. 20. 27.

But to preserve their interest, they tell us that these precepts and promises are given unto the church, and not unto individual believers; as though the church were any thing materially but individual believers, and formally but a disposition of them into a sacred order for their edification. 'Man was not made for the sabbath, but the sabbath was made for man.' Believers were not made for the church, but the church is made for believers; and is of no use, but with respect unto their edification. And to deny all individual persons to be the first object of all gospel precepts and promises, churches in what sense soever you take them, being so only as they are directive of their faith and obedience, is to exempt their consciences from the authority of Christ, to turn them into beasts, and to overthrow the gospel.

Let men now who take care of their own eternal salvation, place themselves in their thoughts in that condition, which the present case and their own circumstances do place them in. The world, the place where they live, the people whereunto they do belong, are filled with different apprehensions, principles, opinions, and practices in and about religion. Some of these, as those between the Papists and the

Protestants, have immediate influence into their eternal condition of blessedness or misery, as both parties contend. Dreadful disorders and confusions have followed, and are like to follow these differences even in this world. They will in this case find, that it highly concerns them to take care that they be not deceived, and thereby ruined eternally, as multitudes are; that they 'be not high-minded, but fear.' A guide is that which they are to look after, that may carry them safely through all these difficulties and dangers. Two immediately offer themselves unto them, tendering the utmost assurance in these things, which the nature of man is capable of in this world. The one is the pope or church of Rome, which requires no more of them, but a blind submission unto its guidance; a way, I confess, to extricate themselves, and to deliver them from all care about their own souls, easy and facile, if safe. The other is the holy Scripture, with the promised aids of the Spirit of God, to lead us unto the understanding of it, and the truth contained in it. But in this way it is required of men, that they make use of their own reason, understanding, judgment, diligence, with fervent prayer for divine assistance.

The present question is, Whether of these two guides such persons ought to betake themselves unto? I am on the consideration of one directive reason only, others shall be afterward spoken unto. And this is, that the Scripture, which all acknowledge to be the word of God, to speak in his name, expressly supposing this case, and all the circumstances of it before laid down, doth thereon frequently direct and command us to make use of this latter guide, if we desire to be saved; and doth nowhere, no not once, on a supposition of this case, send us unto the guidance of the church or pope of Rome, or any other church whatever. Wherefore, for men to suffer themselves to be inveigled, their souls to be perverted, and their faith overthrown by a few captious sophistical reasonings of men, of perverse minds, pursuing their own secular interest; to turn aside from the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles, in so plain, evident, and indisputable a case and duty, is such a folly in itself, such an impiety against God, such a contempt of the Lord Christ, his wisdom, authority, and care, as must be eternally accounted for.

Thirdly, The things for the most part which this pretended guide proposeth unto, and imposeth on the consciences, faith, and practice of them who give up themselves unto its conduct, are so unreasonable, so contrary unto the common sense of Christians, and the very first notions of the minds of men any way enlightened with the doctrine of the gospel; so directly opposite unto the design of God in the revelation of himself unto us, and his commands concerning our faith and obedience; that it is a thing astonishing, how they should attain an access unto them who have any sense of these things. But when once men have their eyes bored out, as they do it for themselves in the resignation they make of their understandings and consciences unto the conduct of this church, they must grind whatever is brought unto them. I shall briefly instance in some few things of this sort.

1. The keeping of the Scripture from their daily and continual use. I speak not directly unto them, who, being brought up from their infancy in that church, know nothing of the Scripture, but that the Bible is an obscure dangerous book unto all laymen, which heretics make use of unto their advantage. Such persons can be contented to want it, or be without it, all their lives; especially seeing it is full of light and principles inconsistent with their carnal lusts and interest. But I speak of such who many of them like Timothy have known the Scriptures from children; and having been conversant in them, have had some experience of their power.

Unto such as these, come persons in the name and on the behalf of this pretended guide. And a compass of plausible words they will use, fit to distract and amuse weak and unstable minds. But the plain sense of what they say in this case is, Cast away this Bible, this book; it doth but perplex you and disturb your minds with things that are above you, which you cannot understand; and is therefore an occasion of almost all the pernicious errors that are in the world. Will not any such person be ready to say, Hath God given this book, this alone, as the only revelation of his mind and will unto us, as the guide and rule whereby we may come unto the eternal enjoyment of him, which you dare not directly deny? hath he commanded me to read, study, medi-

tate, and be conversant in it continually? have I found the benefit of the light, counsel, and consolation administered by it in my own soul; and shall I now forsake it, cast it away, to betake myself unto your guidance and direction? shall I forsake God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, all the prophets and apostles, who daily speak unto me in and by this word, to comply with you? The very horror of the proposal is enough to secure the minds of any who have the least spark of spiritual light or grace, from a compliance with it. Wherefore, whether it be reasonable to leave the word of God, which is full of light, shining like the sun in the firmament, to follow the glimmerings of this wandering meteor, which arose out of a horrible pit, and there will end, is left unto their consideration who take care of the eternal salvation of their own souls.

2. The solemn worship of God, by the guides of the church, in a tongue and language which the people do not understand, is another of their proposals. This they are bound to attend unto, on pain of damnation. But how any thing can be more contrary unto the common sense of them who know what it is to pray in a due manner, no man can conceive. As unto them who do not, yet is it not hard to convince them, where they are not obstinate on other prejudices, how irrational this proposal is, how inconsistent with that reasonable service that God requireth of us. Others will say, that they find hinderances and difficulties enough from and in this duty, from the weakness of their faith and instability of their minds, the suggestions of Satan, with diversions from outward objects; if you add thereunto, that they shall not understand a word of what is spoken in prayer, and they know well enough they shall never pray at all. And the truth is, did we not know whence they took occasion for this strange contrivance, so contrary to the nature of all religion, and what advantage they make of it unto themselves, it could never be sufficiently admired, how such a senseless imagination should befall their minds. I do not design to shew how contrary it is to Scripture precepts and examples, to the practice of all the saints under the Old Testament and the New, with that of the primitive churches, and on all accounts, what an abominable sacrilege it is, so to rob the church of its chiefest treasure; it hath been done

by others sufficiently. I only give it as an instance how unmeet this pretended church is to be such a guide, as whereunto we are to make an absolute resignation of our understandings and consciences in all concerns of religion. And there is nothing that can make them, who have any regard unto their own souls, to reject its guidance with more detestation. Shall they accept them for their guide in religion, who, under pain of damnation, confine them in all the public worship of the church, unto the use of a language that they do not understand? That instead of praying with their understandings, they must be content with a dumb show, with postures and gestures, with altars and pictures, the antic actings of a priest, and a noise of words, whose sense they know not at all? If a man would seek for an infallible guide to hell, it is hard to find one more likely and better qualified unto that purpose, than is this church of Rome.

3. There is at the same instant proposed unto us by this guide, the doctrine of transubstantiation, with the sacrifice of the mass thereon depending. This they say we must believe, at least avow that we do believe, on pain of eternal and temporal destruction also. But herein they require of us, that on the mere credit of their conduct, we must renounce the use of our senses, the exercise of our reason, and actings of faith on divine revelations, all things whereby we are either men or Christians, that we may become blind idolaters. But they who pretending to be our guides in religion, do thereon impose this monstrous imagination on our credulity, with the idolatrous practice wherein it issues, had need give us better security of their divine infallibility, than the angels in heaven can do. For if an angel from heaven should preach this doctrine unto us, we may safely esteem him accursed; Gal. i. 8.

4. The last thing I shall instance in of this kind is, the adoration or worship of images. God says concerning it expressly, 'Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven images; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them.' They say contrary, Thou shalt make unto thyself graven images; thou shalt bow down to them and adore them. And in their use they make them the stage plays in religion, wherewith the minds of ignorant unstable persons

are allured, and seduced into all manner of superstitious practices, and turned off from the simplicity of the gospel. For being once persuaded on the credit of their guide, that the making, use, and adoration of them are lawful, there is enough in the carnal minds of men to make them dote, and even be mad upon them. Wherefore no less service is done unto the interest of sin and the kingdom of Satan hereby, than if they should have taken off all sense of the authority of God, from the consciences of men, in the prohibition of those things which their sensual lusts are most prone unto. Could they have dissolved the obligation of the commands of God against adultery, or stealing, and left men unto the guidance of their own lusts and inclinations, it is evident what abominable excesses the generality of men would run into. Neither do the lusts of the mind engage persons with less fierceness into the pursuit of their objects, than do those of the flesh. And thence the disannulling of this command of God, hath been an inlet unto all abominable idolatry. But herein they will not allow those who give up themselves unto their conduct, once to consider the direct contradiction that is between God's commands and theirs; but believe they must what their church believes, and practise accordingly; which is the most intolerable tyranny over the souls of men, that ever was attempted. Only they will tell us of 'latria,' and 'dulia,' and 'hyperdulia,' of religious worship that is direct or reductive, transient, or terminated on this or that object, and after a maze of the like insignificant terms, the conclusion is positive, You shall worship graven images.

There are also sundry other things wherein they do or would impose on the credulity of men, in open contradiction unto their sense, reason, and experience, as well as unto all evidence of truth from the light and guidance of the Scripture; which are somewhat of another nature than those foregoing. I shall only mention some of them. As, (1.) They would have us believe, that 'we cannot believe the Scripture to be the word of God, but upon the testimony and authority of their church.' All the evidence that a man is capable of in his own mind that he doth so believe it; all that can be given in ordering our lives according unto it as the word of God; the assurance and peace which mul-

titudes of all sorts have in resolving all their interest in things eternal into the faith of it; the sufferings and martyrdoms which many have undergone in the confirmation of it; the uncontrollable pleas that are made of the sufficiency of the motives whereon we believe it so to be, are nothing with them: but we must say, we cannot believe the Scripture to be the word of God, but only on the testimony and authority of their church; and therein both give ourselves the lie, as unto what we know and are assured of, and judge millions to hell, who have lived and died in the faith of it, without any respect unto that testimony or authority. (2.) They will have us to believe, what they do not indeed believe themselves: as for instance, justification by our own works. For practically many of them do for this end trust unto absolutions, masses, the sacraments, and sacramentals of the church, with a reserve for the complement of it in purgatory; which are not our own works; and some of the wisest of them do betake themselves at last to the 'only mercy and grace of God.' So would they have us to venture our souls on that, whereon they will not adventure their own. (3.) Papal personal infallibility was once a principal article of their creed, and the generality of their proselytes do receive it from them, with no less firm assent, than they do unto that of Christ himself. But among themselves they have so multiplied their wrangling disputes about it, as makes it evident, that they believe it only so far as holds proportion with their interest, and is subservient thereunto, indeed not at all. Their disputes of a difference between the court of Rome and the church of Rome, of the pope in his chair and out of it, in the use of help and advice of others, and without this, in a general council and without it, in a particular council and without it; in matter of right and of fact, and the like; make it evident that they know not in what sense to believe it, and so indeed believe it not at all. And whereas they do themselves confess that some of their popes have been of the worst of men, yea, monsters for luxury, uncleanness, and violence, that which they require of us, is not only hard and unreasonable, but impossible for any sober man to grant; namely, that we believe such persons to have been infallible in the declaration of all divine heavenly mysteries; so as that we ought to acquiesce in their declaration of them. (4.)

They would have us believe, that the same body of Christ which was once 'in the fulness of time, made of a woman,' by the power of God, is every day made of a wafer, by the power of a priest. And what indignities are hereby cast on his person hath been sufficiently demonstrated.

These are some of the proposals, which this pretended guide makes unto all them who give up themselves unto its conduct, to be believed with a suitable practice, on the pain of eternal damnation. But yet evident it is, that they are all of them contrary unto the common sense, reason, and experience of all Christians, all that believe the gospel, as well as directly contradictory unto the Scripture, and example of the primitive church. It is therefore left unto the judgment of all sober persons, such as are not yet made drunk with the cup of their abominations, to determine whether any thing, but either profound ignorance and spiritual darkness, or love of sin, with a desire to live securely therein, or secular interests, or a hardening judgment for the abuse of the truth, or a concurrence of all them, can prevail with men to make an entire absolute resignation of their souls, and all their eternal concernments, unto the conduct of this pretended guide.

Fourthly, The way for the attaining the knowledge of the truth, proposed by this guide, is opposite unto the way and means prescribed by God himself unto that end. It is so whether we respect the internal qualifications of our minds, or the duties that he prescribeth, or the aid that he promiseth thereunto. For as unto the first, he requireth that those who would learn the truth, ought to be meek, and lowly, and humble, for such alone he will teach; Psal. xxv. 8, 9. 14. John vi. 45. and if we are not taught of God, we learn nothing as we ought, or not unto any purpose; that they cast out all 'wickedness, and superfluity of naughtiness,' that so they may receive the ingrafted word with meekness; James i. 21. Without these things, they may be always learning, but shall never come unto the knowledge of the truth. And as unto means and duties, two things he enjoins, and indispensably requires of us, in order unto this end. 1. That we study the word continually; that we meditate upon it, and place our delight in it; John i. 8. Deut. vi. 7. Psal. i. 2.

Isa. viii. 20. John v. 30. 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. Psal. cxix. 18. John xvi. 13. 1 John ii. 20. 2. Fervent and diligent prayer, that we may be led into, and preserved in the truth, that we may be enabled to receive it, and hold it fast against temptations and oppositions. For our aid and assistance herein, he commands us to wait for it, and expect the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to open our eyes, to bring us unto the full assurance of understanding, or to lead us into all truth. Of these things, of the necessity of them unto the due knowledge of the truth, we hear nothing from this pretended guide. She knows well enough, that to put the minds of men into these ways, and the use of these means, whereby they may be taught of God, and ‘learn the truth as it is in Jesus,’ is to loose them from herself for ever. Howbeit they are the only ways and means prescribed and blessed of God unto this end, with those other especial duties which belong unto them.

They will say, it may be, that they do instruct their converts in these things, and press them withal unto higher acts of devotion and mortification than others do. But there are two things which deprive them of any advantage by this pretence. For, 1. We see and know of what sort for the most part their converts are. I shall not give that character of them in words, which generally they give of themselves in their works; for I have nothing to do with the persons of men. And I should rejoice to see them give a better evidence of being instructed in these things, than as yet they have done. But, 2. Whatever of this nature they propose and prescribe unto them, it is not unto this end, that they may learn and know the truth. They require no more of any hereunto, but that on their sophistical and frivolous pretences, he give up himself unto their guidance, or submit himself unto the authority of the pope. For hereby he formally becomes a member of the Catholic church, whose faith, whether he know it or no, immediately becomes his; and for particulars he must wait for the priest’s information, as occasion shall require.

This is I confess their great advantage in this world. The way they propose to attain the knowledge of the truth is easy, consistent with the lusts of men, exposed equally to

the wise and foolish, to the sober and intemperate, puts men out of all doubts, giving them all the quiet assurance which deceit and falsehood can communicate.

The way of God unto the same end is difficult unto flesh and blood, destructive unto the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, requiring diligence, humility, and watchfulness in the exercise of grace all our days, which things few are pleased withal. Yet is this way of God so suited unto the nature of religion, so becoming the importance of this duty, so effectual not only unto the attainment of the knowledge of truth, but unto all the ends of it in the life of God; is so necessary on the account of the infinite greatness and holiness of God, with the nature of divine revelations, as that no man, who is not blinded with prejudices and corrupt affections, can decline it, to embrace the other.

There are other things yet, if it be possible, of a higher abomination, to deter all sober persons from touching with this guide, than those already insisted on. And such they are, as the present contrivances and practices of our adversaries, do unavoidably compel us to plead in this cause, and are in themselves sufficient for ever to divest that church of this great and gainful pretence, of being the only guide of all men in religion. For,

Fifthly, Consider what it is, wherein they instruct many of them who betake themselves unto their conduct and guidance; I mean of the agents for and in the name of the church of Rome. The first thing which they labour to fix on their minds and consciences, is absolute obedience unto their immediate guides, with a blind belief of what they propose unto them. And this they prevail on them unto, by assuming a twofold authority unto themselves. And the first is, that of forgiving them all their sins, though against the light of nature, and of their own consciences, which they confess unto them; and this confession they are obliged unto under pain of damnation. Some things indeed they do require of them, in order unto a participation of priestly absolution; but they are all in the power of the priest to prescribe, decline, or accept; which latter they will not be uneasy unto, when it conduceth unto their advantage. The issue is, that in this pardon of their sins, the souls of men may as safely acquiesce, as if they were immediately pardoned by Christ himself.

And if they have occasion, for the advantage of the Catholic cause, to put them on things that are openly sinful, as murder, and sedition, either by virtue of the direction, guidance, and commands of the priests, they lose their nature and become no sins at all, or they are so assured of pardon, as puts them in their consciences, into as good a state and condition as if they had not sinned. And, (2.) They assume unto themselves an authority to grant especial privileges and rewards, in heaven and earth, to the doing of what they command or require, whatever it be. As unto the earth, so many prayers, so many masses, shall be assigned unto their advantage; and in some cases canonization, with all the glorious privileges of it. And as unto heaven, what they so do shall have such a proportion of merit, as shall exalt them unto the second, third, or fourth place of precedency and honour therein, among all the holy martyrs. It is incredible what power and dominion over the consciences of their proselytes they obtain by these means, with other artifices of the like nature. Hence many of them know of no other dependance on any as unto present peace, and eternal blessedness, than that on the priests alone.

Woful practices do follow on these principles. For the minds of men being thus prepared, they dispose of them unto such occasions, or services, for the interest of the Catholic cause, as their own nature, inclinations, the fierceness or softness of their tempers, their outward greatness, power, and wealth, or their straits, wants, and necessities, render them meet unto. For now they are ready for such things, which, if they had not relinquished the care and charge of their own souls, if they had not absolutely resigned them unto others, they would never have entertained a thought of, without detestation and abhorrency. Poor deluded creatures, who could sufficiently bewail their condition, but that for the most part through the love of sin, and the wages of it, they choose these delusions. Some now shall fire cities; some shall murder innocent persons; some shall assassinate kings and potentates; some shall creep into houses and lead captive silly women, laden with sins, led about with divers lusts; and some shall prostitute themselves unto the carnal lusts and pleasures of others; all as they judge conducing unto the Catholic cause, and their own interest therein. These

are they who must answer, not only for the blood of them that are murdered, but of their murderers also. I heartily wish these things were not so, that they never had been so; but being so, it is well that they are known so to be; and that they are written in such legible characters in most nations of Europe, especially in this wherein we live, as that he who runs may read them. I shall not descend unto particular instances; every one's mind and thoughts will suggest them unto them; or they may learn them in Westminster Hall.

It will be said, that on a supposition that these things are so, yet this is the crime of but a few, it may be of a few Jesuits; which others, especially the church, is not concerned in. They are but a few who teach and instruct their converts unto such purposes; but a few that are possessed with those maxims and principles, which lead unto these practices. Notwithstanding their miscarriages, the church itself may be a safe guide unto the souls of men.

I answer two things; 1. That those who have these principles, who teach these practices, are all of them appointed unto their office and work, imposed on the consciences of men as their only guides, by the authority of the church itself. No caution is given by it against them; no rule prescribed whereby they may know them; but they come all armed with the authority of the church, and as such are received by their credulous followers. The whole therefore of what they do, may justly be ascribed unto the church itself. 2. It may be made to appear, that for about a hundred and fifty years past, no plot, no design hath been conceived or perpetrated, wherein kings, princes, private persons were to be murdered or destroyed, wherein nations were to be embroiled in blood and confusion, in order unto the promotion of the Catholic cause, but the church itself was either the contriver or approver of it. Who approved of the murder of the two kings in France, one after another? of the massacre there of a hundred thousand Protestants? Who designed and blessed all preparations for the murder of queen Elizabeth; with the unjust invasion of the nation in 88? Who blessed and protected, what in them lay, the horrible massacre of Ireland; with the slaughters that have been made in other places on the same principles? Was it a few

Jesuits only? was it not the church itself in its head the pope, and its horns the cardinals at Rome?

Wherefore although it seem good unto this church to assume unto itself the sole conduct of the souls of all men, in the matters of religion, which hath thrived in its hands unto an incredible grandeur, in dominion, power, and wealth; yet other men of an ordinary wisdom and capacity, who are not yet taken alive by them at their pleasure, will be ready to judge (especially now the cave of Cacus is opened) that it is necessary for them to take more care of their own souls.

Some will say, that all these things, principles, and practices, are separable from their religion, and that they will take sufficient heed unto themselves, that they give admittance unto none of them, especially such as are against the light of nature, and the known rules of common honesty. Both the goodness of their own natural temper, and the principles of morality, which they will never part withal, will give them and others security herein.

God forbid I should ever charge any persons with any thing that is criminal, whereof they are not, or may not be easily convicted. Those who make these professions shall pass with me at the rate, and upon the credit of their professions; as shall all men in this world, until they contradict and disprove themselves by their actions. But even such persons had need be very careful that they are not deceived herein. The resignation which they are to make of themselves and their consciences unto the conduct of this church, doth quite change both their light and rule; for it includes a renunciation of all principles and persuasions in things divine and moral, that do or may in the least interfere with that conduct. It is true, that neither that church nor any else, can change the nature of things moral in themselves; for although they may call good evil, and evil good; light darkness, and darkness light; yet they cannot make that which is good, evil; nor that which is evil, good; but they may make a false representation of the one and other unto the minds of men. Hence what was evil unto them antecedently unto this resignation of themselves, as the firing of cities, the murder of innocent persons, the overthrow of governments and nations for their own ends, shall

be imposed on them by this pretended infallible guide, as things good and meritorious with reference unto their Catholic ends. These are the two most pernicious devices in all their superstition; 1. That the consciences of men are exempted and taken off from an immediate dependance on and subjection unto the authority of Christ, and put in immediate subjection unto the priests; seeing he neither promiseth any thing unto them, nor commands any thing but by the church. 2. That their commands, because they are theirs, do regulate their consciences even as unto moral good or evil. Nor is it safe for these men to trust too much unto the goodness of their own natures, nor it may be unto others, who are concerned in what they shall do. For as it is the glory of the doctrine and grace of the gospel, to change the wolf, the lion, and the leopard, Isa. xi. 6—9. persons of the fiercest and most violent inclinations, unto quiet associates of lambs and children; so it is to be feared from many instances, that by virtue of their conduct, they can change appearing sheep at least, as unto their natural tempers, into that which is violent, bloody, and poisonous.

Sixthly, Under pretence of being this guide, and to impose their pretensions thereunto on the minds and consciences of men, this church hath filled most nations of Europe with blood and slaughter; making horrible devastations of innumerable persons, both fearing God and living peaceably in the world. Ten times more blood of Christians hath been shed by them unto this end, than was shed in all the primitive pagan persecutions. All that dissent from them may say,

*Quæ regio in terris nostri non plena cruoris?*

Is there any nation in Europe that is not filled with our blood? The last day alone can discover the blood that hath been shed secretly or with little noise by the inquisition, in the Spanish, and some of the Italian territories. England, France, Germany, Flanders, Holland, Ireland, can speak for themselves, in the cruelties which unto this end have been executed in them. The sole reason of all this inhuman violence hath been, that men would not submit their souls and consciences unto that absolute power over

them and conduct of them, which their church claimeth unto itself.

And it is most probable that their absolute conduct is of the same nature with the ways and means whereby they do attempt it, or have obtained it. When men by force and fraud, blood and slaughters, do endeavour to impose their rule upon us, we are not to expect but that the rule will be answerable unto the means that are used for the attaining it. As in the first planting and propagation of Christian religion, the way and means of them were spiritual light, and the evident exercise of all graces, especially meekness, humility, patience in sufferings, and contempt of the world. Hereon men had just grounds to believe and expect, that the conduct which they were invited and called unto, under the rule of Christ, would be of the same nature, meek, holy, just, and good; whereof by experience they found full assurance. So where the rule of our souls and consciences is attempted and carried on by violence, blood, cruelty, and desolation of nations, we have just ground to believe, that if those who use them do prevail therein, their leading and rule will be of the same nature.

It is but reasonable therefore for any man before he make choice of this guide, to ask of himself or others, these few questions. Is there any thing in the gospel which gives countenance unto this way of imposing a guide in religion on the minds and consciences of men? Was there any thing like it in the practices of our Lord Jesus Christ, his apostles, or the primitive churches? Doth this way make a just representation of the spirit, the meekness, the holiness, the love, the patience of our Lord Jesus Christ? Is it consistent with the genius of the doctrine of the gospel, the religion taught therein, as unto its nature and ends, concerning our deportment in this world, and our tendency unto another? Can any man think without horror, that our Lord Jesus Christ should be the author of this way; that he hath appointed that all men should be starved, or hanged, or burned, or otherwise slaughtered, who would not submit unto this doctrine or rule of this or any church, as some of the worst of men shall please to state them? Is not this that which among other things gives us assurance, that the doctrine and superstition of Mahomet were from hell, from the old

murderer; in that it is a prime dictate of them, that those who will not submit unto them are to be destroyed with fire and sword? By that time a man hath a little weighed these inquiries, with such other of the same nature that may be added unto them: if he be not forsaken of all sense of the glory of Christ, of the honour of the gospel, of the reputation of Christian religion, and all care of the salvation of his own soul, he will make a long stand before he give up himself absolutely unto the conduct of this church.

Seventhly, I cannot but mention in the next place, that which because it is commonly pleaded, I shall but mention. And this is, that many important principles and practices of the religion which this pretended guide would impose upon us, are evidently suited unto the carnal interests and lusts of them who have the conduct of it. Such are purgatory, papal pardons, sacrifices for the dead, auricular confession, with priestly absolution thereon; many have already declared how the notion and superstition of these things, did both raise and do maintain their revenues; and are otherwise made use of to make provision for the flesh to fulfil it in the lusts thereof. And there lieth no encouragement herein to engage wise men to give up themselves unto its conduct. But,

Eighthly, Considerate men will be afraid of that conduct under which Christian religion hath lost all its native beauty, simplicity, spiritual glory, and power. How are these things represented unto us in the gospel? How were they exemplified unto us in the lives of the apostles, and of all the sincere primitive converts? The church was through them, 'a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelt righteousness.' The whole of religion as it was at first professed, was nothing but a representation of the wisdom, truth, holiness, love, and compassion of Christ; an evident and glorious means to recover mankind from its apostacy from God, and to reintroduce his image on the souls of men; a blessed way continually to exercise the power of love, goodness, charity, bounty, zeal, and delight in God; a testimony given unto the truth, reality, and substance of things spiritual, invisible, and eternal, with their preference above all earthly things. Under their conduct is this beauty, this

glory of Christian religion lost and defaced. We may say with the prophet of old, 'How is the faithful city become a harlot! righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers;' Isa. i. 21. The church is the temple of God; could we have looked into it of old, we might by faith have seen Christ sitting on his throne, the train of his light, holiness, love, and grace, filling the whole temple. Look into it under their conduct, and there is the dreadful appearance of the lawless person, the man of sin, sitting in the temple of God, shewing himself to be God, to our horror and amazement. Look into the primitive assemblies of Christians, 2 Cor. iii. 8—10. you shall see meekness, humility, and the glorious ministration of the Spirit in outward simplicity. Look into those of this guide, and you shall see them like the house of Micah, Judges xvii. 5. a house of gods, with molten images, graven images, ephods, and teraphims, multiplied instruments of superstition and idolatry. Look on their conversation of old in the world; and it was humble, peaceable, useful, profitable unto mankind, with a contempt of earthly things in comparison of those that are eternal. But under the conduct of this guide, ambition, pride, sensuality, and profaneness, have covered the nations of its communion; in all things have they lost and defaced the native beauty and glory of Christian religion. It will be of no advantage unto any, voluntarily to come in into a participation in this woful apostacy.

Ninthly, The insupportable yoke that this guide puts on kings and sovereign princes, on pretence of its divine right of a universal guidance of them and all their subjects, deserves the consideration of them that are concerned, before they give up themselves unto it. It is true that by and since the reformation, as this power of these men who call themselves this guide, hath been utterly cast off by many; so in those places where on other accounts they maintain their interest, it hath been greatly weakened and impaired. Hence those of the greatest power in the nations of Europe, have had little regard unto their authority, unless it be used unto their interest and advantage. But their principles are still the same as they were; their pretence of divine right the same that it was; and their desires after the exercise of it unto their own ends, not at all abated. Could they once again

enthroned themselves in the consciences of kings themselves and all their subjects; could they destroy the balance of a contrary interest; could they take away the reserves of reliefs against their encroachments, by engaging the assistance of subjects against their princes, of one prince against another, as in former days; there is no reason to think but that they would return unto their former usurpations and insolency. And wise men, yea, princes themselves, may be deceived, if they take their measures of the nature of the papacy, with respect unto civil government, from its present deportment and attempts, though bad enough. Take away the perplexities and difficulties they are cast into, through the rejection of their authority by so many nations, and by the divided interests of kings and potentates thereon; heal their deadly wound, and restore them unto a Catholic power over the consciences of all sorts of men, by the destruction of them by whom it is opposed, and it will quickly appear with another aspect on the world, another manner of influence on the governors and governments of kingdoms and nations than now it doth. But the consideration hereof belongs principally unto them, who are not wont to be unconcerned in the preservation of their just authority. Yet, if occasion require it, a demonstration shall be given of the necessary and unavoidable consequences of the readmission of the papal power, in any of the nations of Europe who have cast it out; and that with respect unto the governors and governments of them.

Among many other considerations, which offer themselves unto the same purpose, and which shall be produced, if occasion is given; I shall add one more and close this discourse. And this is, that the foundation of all the religious worship, which this guide directs unto, whence all other parts of it do proceed, and whereon they do depend, consists of the overthrow of one of the principle articles of the Christian faith. And this is, that 'our Lord Jesus hath by one offering, for ever perfected them that are sanctified;' as it is expressed by the apostle, Heb. x. 14. In direct opposition hereunto, the ground and reason of their mass and the sacrifice therein, which is the life, soul, centre, and foundation of all their religious worship, lies in this, that there is a necessity that Christ be offered often, yea, every

day, in places innumerable, without which, they say, the church can neither be sanctified or perfected. Such a guide is this church, as that it lays the foundation of all its sacred worship in the overthrow of the principal foundation of the Christian faith.

God, in his appointed time, will put an end unto all these extravagancies, excesses, and distractions in his church; 'when violence shall be no more heard in her land, wasting nor destruction within her borders, when she shall call her walls salvation, and her gates praise.'

END OF VOL. XVIII.