

On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church – By Martin Luther



Martin Luther

I found the original document [BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH](#) on the Internet and converted it to HTML to make it more readable and indexable by search engines. Martin Luther had something to say that most modern day Lutherans have probably never read! How can they even call themselves “Lutherans” when they don’t know the doctrines he taught, let alone follow them? And why do most Protestant denominations compromise with Rome in ecumenicism and with Vatican controlled modern Bible translations though the founders of the Protestant Reformation called the Pope the Antichrist and urged people to come out of Rome’s whorish Babylonian System? Answer: Because they are ignorant of what Martin Luther and other leaders of the Protestant Reformation had to say about Rome and the Pope. And they are even ignorant of what Charles Spurgeon, Charles Chiniquy, Samuel B. Morse, and other Protestant authors from the 19th century had to say. My hope and prayer is to educate them by posting these classic works in HTML format to make them more accessible to the world.

Martin Luther, of the Order of St. Augustine, salutes his friend Hermann Tulichius.

Whether I will or not, I am compelled to become more learned day by day, since so many great masters vie with each other in urging me on and giving me practice. I wrote about indulgences two years ago, but now I extremely regret having published that book. At that time I was still involved in a great and superstitious respect for the tyranny of Rome, which led me to judge that indulgences were not to be totally rejected, seeing them, as I did, to be approved by so general a consent among men. And no wonder, for at that time it was I alone who was rolling this stone. Afterwards, however, with the kind aid of Sylvester and the friars, who supported indulgences so strenuously, I perceived that they were nothing but mere impostures of the flatterers of

Rome, whereby to make away with the faith of God and the money of men. And I wish I could prevail upon the booksellers, and persuade all who have read them, to burn the whole of my writings on indulgences, and in place of all I have written about them to adopt this proposition: Indulgences are wicked devices of the flatterers of Rome.

After this, Eccius and Emser, with their fellow-conspirators, began to instruct me concerning the primacy of the Pope. Here too, not to be ungrateful to such learned men, I must confess that their works helped me on greatly; for, while I had denied that the Papacy had any divine right, I still admitted that it had a human right. But after hearing and reading the super-subtle subtleties of those coxcombs, by which they so ingeniously set up their idol—my mind being not entirely unteachable in such matters—I now know and am sure that the Papacy is the kingdom of Babylon, and the power of Nimrod the mighty hunter. Here moreover, that all may go prosperously with my friends, I entreat the booksellers, and entreat my readers, to burn all that I have published on this subject, and to hold to the following proposition:

The Papacy is the mighty hunting of the Bishop of Rome.

This is proved from the reasonings of Eccius, of Emser, and of the Leipzig lecturer on the Bible.

At the present time they are playing at schooling me concerning communion in both kinds, and some other subjects of the greatest importance. I must take pains not to listen in vain to these philosophical guides of mine. A certain Italian friar of Cremona has written a "Revocation of Martin Luther to the Holy See"—that is to say, not that I revoke, as the words imply, but that he revokes me. This is the sort of Latin that the Italians nowadays are beginning to write. Another friar, a German of Leipzig, Lecturer, as you know, on the whole canon of the Bible, has written against me concerning the Sacrament in both kinds, and is about, as I hear, to do still greater and wonderful wonders. The Italian indeed has cautiously concealed his name; perhaps alarmed by the examples of Cajetan and Sylvester. The man of Leipzig, however, as befits a vigorous and fierce German, has set forth in a number of verses on his title-page, his name, his life, his sanctity, his learning, his office, his glory, his honour, almost his very shoe-last. From him no doubt I shall learn not a little, since he writes a letter of dedication to the very Son of God; so familiar are these saints with Christ, who reigns in heaven. In short, three magpies seem to be addressing me, one, a Latin one, well; another, a Greek one, still better; the third, a Hebrew one, best of all. What do you think I have to do now, my dear Hermann, but to prick up my ears? The matter is handled at Leipzig by the Observants of the Holy Cross.

Hitherto I have foolishly thought that it would be an excellent thing, if it were determined by a General Council, that both kinds in the Sacrament should be administered to the laity. To correct this opinion, this more than most learned friar says that it was neither commanded nor decreed, whether by Christ or by the Apostles, that both kinds should be administered to the laity; and that it has therefore been left to the judgment of the Church, which we are bound to obey, what should be done or left undone on this point. Thus speaks he. You ask, perhaps, what craze has possession of the man, or

against whom he is writing; since I did not condemn the use of one kind, and did leave it to the judgment of the Church to ordain the use of both kinds. And this he himself endeavours to assert, with the object of combating me by this very argument. I reply, that this kind of argument is a familiar one with all who write against Luther; namely, either to assert the very thing which they attack, or to set up a figment that they may attack it. Thus did Sylvester, Eccius, Emser, the men of Cologne too, and those of Louvain. If this friar had gone back from their spirit, he would not have written against Luther.

A greater piece of good fortune, however, has befallen this man than any of the others. Whereas he intended to prove that the use of one kind had neither been commanded nor decreed, but left to the decision of the Church, he brings forward Scriptures to prove that, by the command of Christ, the use of one kind was ordained for the laity. Thus it is true, according to this new interpreter of Scripture, that the use of one kind was not commanded, and at the same time was commanded, by Christ. You know how specially those logicians of Leipzig employ this new kind of argument. Does not Emser also, after having professed in his former book to speak fairly about me, and after having been convicted by me of the foulest envy and of base falsehoods, confess, when about to confute me in his later book, that both were true, and that he had written of me in both an unfair and a fair spirit? A good man indeed, as you know!

But listen to our specious advocate of one species, in whose mind the decision of the Church and the command of Christ are the same thing; and again the command of Christ and the absence of his command are the same thing. With what dexterity he proves that only one kind should be granted to the laity, by the command of Christ, that is, by the decision of the Church! He marks it with capital letters in this way, "AN INFALLIBLE FOUNDATION." Next he handles with incredible wisdom the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. John, in which Christ speaks of the bread of heaven and the bread of life, which is Himself. These words this most learned man not only misapplies to the Sacrament of the Altar, but goes farther, and, because Christ said: "I am the living bread," and not: "I am the living cup," he concludes that in that passage the sacrament in only one kind was appointed for the laity. But the words that follow: "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed;" and again, "Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood"—since it was evident to this friar's brains that they tell irrefutably in favour of reception in both kinds, and against that in one kind—he evades very happily and learnedly in this way: "That Christ meant nothing else by these words, than that he who should receive one kind, should receive under this both the body and the blood." This he lays down as his infallible foundation of a structure so worthy of holy and heavenly reverence.

Learn now, along with me, from this man, that in the sixth chapter of St. John Christ commands reception in one kind, but in such a manner that this commanding means leaving the matter to the decision of the Church; and further, that Christ in the same chapter speaks of the laity only, not of the presbyters. For to us this living bread from heaven, that is, the sacrament in one kind, does not belong, but perchance the bread of death from hell. Now

what is to be done with the deacons and sub-deacons? As they are neither laymen nor priests, they ought, on this distinguished authority, to use neither one nor both kinds. You understand, my dear Tulichius, this new and observant manner of handling Scripture. But you must also learn this, that Christ, in the sixth chapter of St. John, is speaking of the sacrament of the Eucharist; though He Himself teaches us that He is speaking of faith in the incarnate word, by saying: "This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom He hath sent." But this Leipzig professor of the Bible must be permitted to prove whatever he pleases out of any passage of Scripture he pleases. For he is an Anaxagorean, nay, an Aristotelian theologian, to whom names and words when transposed mean the same things and everything. Throughout his whole book he so fits together the testimonies of Scripture, that, if he wishes to prove that Christ is in the sacrament, he ventures to begin thus: "The Lesson of the book of the Revelation of the blessed John." And as suitably as this would be said, so suitably does he say everything, and thinks, like a wise man, to adorn his ravings by the number of passages he brings forward.

I pass over the rest, that I may not quite kill you with the dregs of this most offensive drain. Lastly he adduces Paul (1 Cor. xi.), who says that he had received from the Lord and had delivered to the Corinthians the use both of the bread and of the cup. Here again, as everywhere else, our advocate of one species handles the Scriptures admirably, and teaches that in that passage Paul permitted—not "delivered"—the use of both kinds. Do you ask how he proves it? Out of his own head, as in the case of the sixth chapter of John; for it does not become this lecturer to give a reason for what he says, since he is one of those whose proofs and teachings all come from their own visions. Here then we are taught that the Apostle in that passage did not write to the whole church of Corinth, but only to the laity, and that therefore he gave no permission to the priests, but that they were deprived of the whole sacrament; and next, that, by a new rule of grammar, "I have received from the Lord" means the same thing as "It has been permitted by the Lord;" and "I delivered to you" the same thing as "I permitted to you." I beg you especially to note this. For it follows hence that not only the Church, but every worthless fellow anywhere will be at liberty, under the teaching of this master, to turn into permissions the whole body of the commandments, institutions, and ordinances of Christ and the Apostles.

I see that this man is possessed by an angel of Satan, and that those who act in collusion with him are seeking to obtain a name in the world through me, as being worthy to contend with Luther. But this hope of theirs shall be disappointed, and, in my contempt for them, I shall leave them for ever unnamed, and shall content myself with this one answer to the whole of their books. If they are worthy that Christ should bring them back to a sound mind, I pray him to do so in his mercy. If they are not worthy of this, then I pray that they may never cease to write such books, and that the enemies of the truth may not be permitted to read any others. It is a common and true saying: "This I know for certain, that if I fight with filth, whether I conquer or am conquered, I am sure to be defiled." In the next place, as I see that they have plenty of leisure and of paper, I will take care that they shall have abundant matter for writing, and will keep in advance of them, so

that while they, in the boastfulness of victory, are triumphing over some one heresy of mine, as it seems to them, I shall meanwhile be setting up a new one. For I too am desirous that these illustrious leaders in war should be adorned with many titles of honour. And so, while they are murmuring that I approve of communion in both kinds, and are most successfully engaged on this very important subject, so worthy of themselves, I shall go farther, and shall now endeavour to show that all who deny to the laity communion in both kinds are acting impiously. To do this the more conveniently, I shall make a first essay on the bondage of the Church of Rome; with the intention of saying very much more in its own proper time, when those most learned papists shall have got the better of this book.

This, moreover, I do in order that no pious reader who may meet with my book may be disgusted at the dross I have handled, and have reason to complain that he finds nothing to read which can cultivate or instruct his mind, or at least give occasion for instructive reflection. You know how dissatisfied my friends are that I should occupy myself with the paltry twistings of these men. They say that the very reading of their books is an ample confutation of them, but that from me they look for better things, which Satan is trying to hinder by means of these men. I have determined to follow the advice of my friends, and to leave the business of wrangling and inveighing to those hornets.

Of the Italian friar of Cremona I shall say nothing. He is a simple and unlearned man, who is endeavouring to bring me back by some thongs of rhetoric to the Holy See, from which I am not conscious of having ever withdrawn, nor has any one proved that I have. His principal argument in some ridiculous passages is, that I ought to be moved for the sake of my profession, and of the transfer of the imperial power to the Germans. He seems indeed altogether to have meant not so much to urge my return as to write the praises of the French and of the Roman pontiff, and he must be allowed to testify his obsequiousness to them by this little work, such as it is. He neither deserves to be handled severely, since he does not seem to be actuated by any malice, nor to be learnedly confuted, since through pure ignorance and inexperience he trifles with the whole subject.

To begin. I must deny that there are seven Sacraments, and must lay it down, for the time being, that there are only three, baptism, penance, and the bread, and that by the Court of Rome all these have been brought into miserable bondage, and the Church despoiled of all her liberty. And yet, if I were to speak according to the usage of Scripture, I should hold that there was only one sacrament, and three sacramental signs. I shall speak on this point more at length at the proper time; but now I speak of the sacrament of the bread, the first of all sacraments.

I shall say then what advance I have made as the result of my meditations in the ministry of this sacrament. For at the time when I published a discourse on the Eucharist I was still involved in the common custom, and did not trouble myself either about the rightful or the wrongful power of the Pope. But now that I have been called forth and become practised in argument, nay, have been dragged by force into this arena, I shall speak out freely what I think. Let all the papists laugh or lament against me alone.

In the first place, the sixth chapter of John must be set aside altogether, as not saying a single syllable about the sacrament; not only because the sacrament had not yet been instituted, but much more because the very sequence of the discourse and of its statements shows clearly that Christ was speaking—as I have said before—of faith in the incarnate Word. For He says: “My words, they are spirit and they are life;” showing that He was speaking of that spiritual eating, wherewith he who eats, lives; while the Jews understood Him to speak of a carnal eating, and therefore raised a dispute. But no eating gives life, except the eating of faith, for this is the really spiritual and living eating; as Augustine says: “Why dost thou get ready thy stomach and thy teeth? Believe, and thou hast eaten.” A sacramental eating does not give life, for many eat unworthily, so that Christ cannot be understood to have spoken of the sacrament in this passage. There are certainly some who have misapplied these words to the sacrament, as did the writer of the decretals some time ago, and many others. It is one thing, however, to misapply the Scriptures, and another to take them in their legitimate sense; otherwise when Christ says: “Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, ye have no life in you,” He would be condemning all infants, all the sick, all the absent, and all who were hindered in whatever manner from a sacramental eating, however eminent their faith, if in these words He had meant to enjoin a sacramental eating. Thus Augustine, in his second book against Julianus, proves from Innocentius that even infants, without receiving the sacrament, eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ; that is, partake in the same faith as the Church. Let this then be considered as settled, that the sixth chapter of John has nothing to do with the matter. For which reason I have written elsewhere that the Bohemians could not rightfully depend upon this passage in their defence of reception in both kinds.

[Next chapter: [Concerning the Lord's Supper](#)]