

that he is trustworthy, and able to comfort and advise, has probably received voluntary confessions from sinners. It is the privilege of every member of a religious community to seek religious help and counsel from his spiritual pastors. In that way, never seeking it, never urging it, never inviting it, I myself have heard, and frequently hear, many a tale of sin and woe outpoured to me by men with whom I have prayed, and whom I have advised, and by God's grace been enabled to help. But this differs *toto coelo* from auricular confession. It is utterly different from telling young women and others that "they must never go to mass" (as it is now called) "without confession";¹ that they "must kneel before their priest as a culprit before his judge"; that "the priest as far as his priesthood is concerned, is Christ Himself"; that "the priest washes and cleanses the soul, he restores it to health pure and white." It is inconceivably different from putting into the hands of ignorant servant girls English translations of Popish books on the confessional; from such travesties and misrepresentations of truth as the sentence that, Christ Himself received confessions, amongst others from *the woman taken in adultery, who remained with Him in the Temple!* It is inconceivably different from teaching our fellow-sinners to say, and to say repeatedly, "For these and all my other sins . . . I most humbly ask pardon of God, and of you my spiritual father penance, counsel, and absolution."

Again, it is worse than unavailing to quote John xx. 23 as though it gave any power to any priest to say, "I absolve thee," otherwise than in a purely conditional and declarative sense. On this point it will be enough for most English Churchmen if I quote the authority of our greatest and most learned living theologian, the Bishop of Durham: "The commission" (to remit and retain sins by virtue of the gift of the Holy Ghost) "*must be regarded properly as the gift of the Christian society, and NOT as that of the*

¹ Even Romish writers—such as St. Bonaventura, Cajetan, and Erasmus—admit that confession is not necessary. "For confession to a priest," says Bishop Lloyd, of Worcester (1693), "the necessity of it was unknown to the Fathers of the Primitive Church. Nay, above a thousand years after Christ it was held disputable in the Roman Church." "To be placed under the obligation of going to a priest to confess," wrote Bishop Marsh . . . "is such an insult on a rational being, that even the prejudices of education are hardly sufficient to account for the patience with which the servitude is endured" ("Comparative View," p. 197).