

XXVI. THE DISTINCTION OF FOODS

¹ In former times men taught, preached, and wrote that **distinctions among foods and similar traditions which had been instituted by men serve to earn grace and make satisfaction for sin.** ² For this reason new fasts, new ceremonies, new orders, and the like were invented daily, and were ardently and urgently promoted, as if these were a necessary service of God by means of which grace would be earned if they were observed and a great sin committed if they were omitted. ³ Many harmful errors in the church have resulted from this.

⁴ In the **first place, the grace of Christ and the teaching concerning faith are thereby obscured,** and yet the Gospel earnestly urges them upon us and strongly insists that we regard the merit of Christ as something great and precious and know that faith in Christ is to be esteemed far above all works. ⁵ On this account St. Paul contended mightily against the law of Moses and against human tradition so that we should learn that we do not become good in God's sight by our works but that it is only through faith in Christ that we obtain grace for Christ's sake. ⁶ This teaching has been almost completely extinguished by those who have taught that grace is to be earned by prescribed fasts, distinctions among foods, vestments, etc.

⁸ In the **second place, such traditions have also obscured the commands of God,** for these traditions were exalted far above God's commands. ⁹ This also was regarded as **Christian life:** whoever observed festivals in this way, prayed in this way, fasted in this way, and dressed in this way was said to live a spiritual and Christian life. ¹⁰ On the other hand, **other necessary good works were considered secular and unspiritual:** the works which everybody is obliged to do according to his calling — for example, that a husband should labor to support his wife and children and bring them up in the fear of God, that a wife should bear children and care for them, that a prince and magistrates should govern land and people, etc. ¹¹ Such works, commanded by God, were to be regarded as secular and imperfect, while traditions were to be given the glamorous title of alone being holy and perfect works. Accordingly there was no end or limit to the making of such traditions.

¹² In the **third place,** such traditions have turned out to be **a grievous burden to consciences,** for it was not possible to keep all the traditions, and yet the people were of the opinion that they were a necessary service of God. ¹³ **Gerson** writes that many fell into despair on this account, and some even committed suicide, because they had not heard anything of the consolation of the grace of Christ. ¹⁴ We can see in the writings of the summists and canonists how consciences have been confused, for they undertook to collate the traditions and sought mitigations to relieve consciences, ¹⁵ but they were **so occupied with such efforts** that they neglected all wholesome Christian teachings about more important things, such as faith, consolation in severe trials, and the like. ¹⁶ Many devout and learned people before our time have also complained that such traditions caused so much strife in the church that **godly people were thereby hindered from coming to a right knowledge of Christ.** Gerson and others have complained bitterly about this. ¹⁷ In fact, **Augustine** was also displeased that consciences were burdened with so many traditions, and he taught in this connection that they were not to be considered necessary observances.

¹⁸ Our teachers have not taught concerning these matters out of malice or contempt of spiritual authority, ¹⁹ but dire need has compelled them to give instruction about the aforementioned errors which have arisen from a wrong estimation of tradition. ²⁰ **The Gospel demands that the teaching about faith should and must be emphasized in the church, but this teaching cannot be understood if it is supposed that grace is earned through self-chosen works.**

²¹ **It is therefore taught that grace cannot be earned, God cannot be reconciled, and sin cannot be atoned for by observing the said human traditions. Accordingly they should not be made into a necessary service of God.** ²² Reasons for this shall be cited from the Scriptures. In **Matt. 15:1-20** Christ defends the apostles for not observing the customary traditions, and he adds, “In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (**Matt. 15:9**). ²³ Since he calls them vain service, they must not be necessary. Thereupon Christ says, “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man.” ¹ ²⁴ Paul also says in **Rom. 14:17**, “The kingdom of God does not mean food and drink,” ²⁵ and in **Col. 2:16** he says, “Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival,” etc. ²⁷ In **Acts 15:10, 11** Peter says, “Why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” ²⁸ Here Peter forbids the burdening of consciences with additional outward ceremonies, whether of Moses or of another. ²⁹ In **1 Tim. 4:1, 3** such prohibitions as forbid food or marriage are called a doctrine of the devil, for it is diametrically opposed to the Gospel to institute or practice such works for the purpose of earning forgiveness of sin or with the notion that nobody is a Christian unless he performs such services.

³⁰ Although our teachers are, like **Jovinian**², accused of forbidding mortification and discipline, their writings reveal something quite different. ³¹ They have always taught concerning the holy cross that Christians are obliged to suffer, ³² and this is true and real rather than invented mortification.

³³ **They also teach that everybody is under obligation to conduct himself, with reference to such bodily exercise as fasting and other discipline, so that he does not give occasion to sin, but not as if he earned grace by such works.** ³⁴ Such bodily exercise should not be limited to certain specified days but should be practiced continually. ³⁵ Christ speaks of this in Luke 21:34, “Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation,” ³⁶ and again, “This kind of demon cannot be driven out by anything but fasting and prayer.” ³⁷ Paul said that he pommeled his body and subdued it, ³⁸ and by this he indicated that it is not the purpose of mortification to merit grace but **to keep the body in such a condition that one can perform the duties required by one’s calling.** ³⁹ Thus fasting in itself is not rejected, but what is rejected is making a **necessary service** of fasts on prescribed days and with specified foods, for this confuses consciences.

⁴⁰ We on our part also retain **many ceremonies and traditions** (such as the liturgy of the Mass and various canticles, festivals, and the like) which serve to preserve order in the church. ⁴¹ At the same time, however, the people are instructed that such outward forms of service do not make us righteous before God and that they are to be observed without burdening consciences, which is to say that it is not a sin to omit them if this is done without causing scandal. ⁴² **The ancient Fathers** maintained such **liberty with respect to outward ceremonies**, ⁴³ for in the East they kept Easter at a time different from that in Rome. When some regarded this difference a

¹ Mt 15:11

² The Reformers were here misled by Jerome’s slanderous misrepresentation of Jovinian, Roman ascetic of the fourth century who contended against the monastic teaching about merits and the stages of ethical perfection but not against “mortification and discipline.”

Januarius -(Gennaro; *fl.* 3d *c.*). *Bp.* Beneventum, *It.*; allegedly martyred at Pozzuoli, near Naples, in Diocletian-Maximian persecution (see *Persecution of Christians*, 4); since *ca.* the 14th *c.*, relics of his blood are said to liquify a number of times a *yr.*

³ Mark 9:29

divisive of the church, they were admonished by others that it was not necessary to maintain uniformity in such customs. ⁴⁴ Irenaeus said, "Disagreement in fasting does not destroy unity in faith," and there is a statement in Dist. 12 that such disagreement in human ordinances is not in conflict with the unity of Christendom. ⁴⁵ Moreover, *the Tripartite History*, Book 9, gathers many examples of dissimilar church usages and adds the profitable Christian observation, "It was not the intention of the apostles to institute holy days but to teach faith and love."

Roman Confutation, to Article XXVI (V. Of the Distinction of Meats)

What they afterwards assert concerning the distinction of meats and like traditions, of which they seem to make no account, must be rejected. 2. For we know from the apostle that all power is of God, and especially that ecclesiastical power has been given by God for edification; for this reason, from the Christian and devout heart of the holy Church the constitutions of the same holy catholic and apostolic Church should be received as are useful to the Church, as well for promoting divine worship as for restraining the lust of the flesh, while they enable us the more readily to keep the divine commands, and when well considered are found in the Holy Scriptures; and he who despises or rashly resists them grievously offends God, according to Christ's word: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me," [Luke 10 \[16\]](#).

3. A prelate, however, is despised when his statutes are despised, according to St. Paul, not only when he says, "He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit," [1 Thess. 4 \[8\]](#), but also to the bishops: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to rule the Church of God," [Acts 20 \[28\]](#). 4. If prelates, therefore, have the power to rule, they will have the power also to make statutes for the salutary government of the Church and the growth of subjects. For the same apostle enjoined upon the Corinthians that among them all things should be done in order, [1 Cor. 14 \[40\]](#); but this cannot be done without laws. 5. On that account he said to the Hebrews: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account," [Heb. 13 \[17\]](#). Here St. Paul reckons not only obedience, but also the reason for obedience....

8. Most false also is their declaration that the righteousness of faith is obscured by such ordinances; nay, he is rather mad and insane who would observe them without faith. For they are given to believers, and not to Turks or Ishmaelites. "For what have I to do to judge them that are without?" [1 Cor. 5 \[12\]](#).

9. Moreover, in extolling here faith above all things they antagonize St. Paul, as we have said above, and do violence to St. Paul, whom they pervert to evangelical works when he speaks of legal works, as all these errors have been above refuted. 10. False also is it that ecclesiastical ordinances obscure God's commands, since they prepare man for these, as fasts suppress the lust of the flesh and help him from falling into luxury. 11. False also is it that it is impossible to observe ordinances, for the Church is not a cruel mother who makes no exceptions in the celebration of festivals and in fasting and the like....

14. In like manner they do violence to St. Paul, for, [1 Tim. 4 \[1, 4\]](#), he calls that a doctrine of demons that forbids meats, as the Tatianites, Marcionites and Manichseans thought that meats were unclean, as is clear from the words that follow, when St. Paul adds: "Every creature of God is good." But the Church does not forbid meats on the ground that they are evil and unclean, but as an easier way to keep God's commandments; therefore the opposite arguments fail....