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An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility
by Martin Luther (1483-1546)

An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility of the German Nation
Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate, 1520

by Martin Luther
(1520)

Introduction and Translation by C. M. Jacobs
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Part 1
Translator's Introduction

INTRODUCTION

THE OPEN LETTER TO THE CHRISTIAN NOBILITY OF THE GERMAN NATION is closely related to the tract ON THE PAPACY AT ROME: A REPLY TO THE CELEBRATED ROMANIST AT LEIPZIG.¹ In a letter to Spalatin² dated before June 8, 1520, Luther says: "I shall assail that ass of an Alveld in such wise as not to forget the Roman pontiff, and neither of them will be pleased." In the same letter he writes, "I am minded to issue a broadside to Charles and the nobility of Germany against the tyranny and baseness of the Roman curia." The attack upon Alveld is the tract on THE PAPACY AT ROME; the *scheda publica* grew into the OPEN LETTER. At the time when the letter to Spalatin was written, the work on THE PAPACY AT ROME must have been already in press, for it appeared in print on the 26th of the month,³ and the composition of the OPEN LETTER had evidently not yet begun. On the 23rd Luther sent the manuscript of the Open Letter to Amsdorf,⁴ with the request that he read it and suggest changes. The two weeks immediately preceding the publication of the work ON THE PAPACY must, therefore, have been the time when the Open Letter was composed. In the conclusion to the earlier work Luther had said: "Moreover, I should be truly glad if kings, princes, and all the nobles would take hold, and turn the knaves from Rome out of the country, and keep the appointments to bishoprics and benefices out of their hands. How has Roman avarice come to usurp all the foundations, bishoprics and benefices of our fathers? Who has ever read or heard of such monstrous robbery? Do we not also have the people who need them, while out of our poverty we must enrich the ass-drivers and stable-boys, no, the harlots and knaves at Rome, who look upon us as nothing else but arrant fools, and make us the objects of their vile mockery? Oh, the pity, that kings and princes have so little reverence for Christ, and His honor concerns them so little that they allow such abominations to gain the upper hand, and look on, while at Rome they think of nothing but to continue in their madness and to increase the abounding misery, until no hope is left on earth except in the temporal authorities. Of this I will say more anon, if this Romanist comes again; let this suffice for a beginning. May God help us at length to open our eyes. Amen."

This passage may fairly be regarded as the germ of the Open Letter. The ideas of the latter work are suggested with sufficient clearness to show that its materials are already at hand, and its plan already in the author's mind. The threat to write it is scarcely veiled. That Luther did not wait for that particular Romanist to "come again" may have been due to the intervention of another Romanist, none other than his old opponent, Sylvester Prierias. Before the 7th of June⁵ Luther had received a copy of Prierias' *Epitome of a Reply to Martin Luther*,⁶ which is the boldest and baldest possible assertion of the very theory of papal power which Luther had sought to demolish in his tract on the Papacy. In the preface to his reprint of the *Epitome*, Luther bids farewell to Rome: "Farewell, unhappy, hopeless, blasphemous Rome! The wrath of God hath come upon

¹ In this edition, I, 337 ff.

² ENDERS, II, 414; SMITH, *L's Correspondence*, I, No. 266.

³ ENDERS, II, 424.

⁴ See below, p. 62.

⁵ See letter of June 7th to John Hess, ENDERS, II, 411; SMITH, I, No. 265.

⁶ Published at Rome 1519: printed with Luther's preface and notes, Weimar Ed., VI, 328 ff.; Erl. Ed., op. var. arg., II, 79 ff.

you, as you have deserved! We have cared for Babylon, she is not healed; let us, then, leave her, that she may be the habitation of dragons, specters and witches, and true to her name of Babel, an everlasting confusion; a new pantheon of wickedness.”⁷

These words were written while the Open Letter was in course of composition. The Open Letter is, therefore, Luther’s first publication after the time when he recognized that the breach between him and the papal church was complete, and likely to be permanent. Meanwhile, the opposing party had come to the same conclusion. The verdict of the pope upon Luther had been long delayed, but on the 15th of June, midway between the letter to Spalatin, above mentioned, and completion of the Open Letter, Leo X signed the bull of excommunication, though it was not published in Germany until later. Thus Open Letter shows us the mind of Luther in the weeks when the permanent separation between him and Rome took place. It was also the time when he had the highest hopes from the promised support of the German knights,⁸ who formed the patriotic party Germany and are included in the “nobility” to whom the Open Letter is addressed.⁹

The first edition of 4000 copies came off the press of Melchior Lotther in Wittenberg before the 18th of August.¹⁰ It is surmised¹¹ that the earlier portion¹² of the work was not contained in the original manuscript, but was added while it was in the printer’s hands; perhaps it was added at the suggestion of Amsdorf. Less than a week later a second edition was in course of preparation.¹³ This “enlarged and revised edition”¹⁴ contained three passages not included in the first.¹⁵ They are indicated in the notes to the present edition.

He who would know the true Luther must read more than one of his writings; he must not by any chance omit to read the Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation. In his other works we learn to know him as the man of God, or the prophet, or the theologian; in this treatise we meet Luther the German. His heart is full of grief for the affliction of his people, and grief turns to wrath as he observes that this affliction is put upon them by the tyranny and greed of the pope and the cardinals and the “Roman vermin?” The situation is desperate; appeals and protests have been all in vain; and so, as a last resort, he turns to the temporal authorities, – to Charles V, newly elected, but as yet uncrowned; to the territorial lords, great and small, who have a voice in the imperial diet and powers of jurisdiction in their own domains, – reciting the abuses of “Roman tyranny,” and pleading with them to intervene in behalf of the souls that are going to destruction “through the devilish rule of Rome.” It is a cry out of the heart of Germany, a nation whose bent is all religious, but which, from that very circumstance, is all the more open to the insults and wrongs and deceptions of the Roman curia.

Yet it is no formless and incoherent cry, but an orderly recital of the ills of Germany. There are times when we feel in reading it that the writer is laying violent hands on his wrath in the effort

⁷ Weimar Ed., VI, 329.

⁸ See ENDERS, II, 415,443; SMITH, Nos. 269,279, and documents in St. Louis Ed., XV, 1630 ff.

⁹ See KOSTLIN-KAWERAU, Martin Luther, I, 308 ff., and Weimar Ed., VI, 381ff.

¹⁰ See Luther’s letters to Lang and Staupitz, who wished to have the publication withheld (ENDERS, II, 461,463).

¹¹ Clemen, I, 362

¹² Below, pp. 63-90.

¹³ See Weimar Ed., VI, 397.

¹⁴ See title B, *ibid.*, 398.

¹⁵ Printed as an appendix in *Clemen*, I, 421-425.

to be calm. For all its scathing quality, it is a sane arraignment of those who “under the holy name of Christ and St. Peter” are responsible for the nation’s woes, and the remedies that are proposed are, many of them, practicable as well as reasonable.

The materials of the work are drawn from many sources, – from hearsay, from personal observation, from such histories as Luther had at his command, from the proceedings of councils and of diets; there are passages which would seem to bear more than an accidental resemblance to similar passages in Hutten’s *VADISCUS*. All grist that came to Luther’s mill. But the Spirit of the work is Luther’s own.

For the general historian, who is concerned more with the practical than with the theoretical or theological aspects of the Reformation, the *OPEN LETTER*¹⁶ is undoubtedly Luther’s greatest work. Its frank outspokenness true condition of Germany, the number and variety of the subjects that it treats, the multiplicity of the sources from which the subject-matter is drawn, and the point of view from which the whole is discussed make it a work of absorbing interest and priceless historical value. It shows, as does no other single work of the Reformation time, the things that were in men’s minds and the variety of motives which led them to espouse the cause of the Protestant party. Doctrine, ethics, history, politics, economics, all have their place in the treatise. It is not only “a blast on the war-trumpet,” but a connecting link between the thought of the Middle Ages and that of modern times, prophetic of the new age, but showing how closely the new is bound up with the old.

The text of the Open Letter is found in Weimar Ed., VI, 404-469; Erl. Ed., XXI, 277-360; Walch Ed., X, 296-399; St. Louis Ed., X, 266-351; Berlin Ed., 1,203-290; Clemen 1,363-425. The text of the Berlin Ed. is modernized and annotated by E. Schneider. The editions of K. Benrath (Halle, 1883) and E. Lemme (*Die 3 grossen Reformationsschriften L’s vom J. 1520*; Gotha, 1884) contain a modernized text and extensive notes. A previous English translation in Wace and Buchheim, *Luther’s Primary Works* (London and Philadelphia, 1884). The present translation is based on the text of Clemen.

For full discussion of the contents of the work, especially its sources, See Weimar Ed., VI, 381-391; Schafer, *LUTHER ALS KIRCHEN HISTORIKER*, Gutersloh, 1897; Kohler, *L’S SCHRIFT AN DEN ADEL... IM SPIEGEL DER KULTURGESCHICHTE*, Halle, 1895, and *LUTHER UND DIE KIRCHENGESCHICHTE*, Erlangen, 1900. Extensive comment in all the biographies, especially *KOSTLIN-KAWERAU I*, 315 ff.

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¹⁶ So it was called by Johann Lang (ENDERS. II, 461).

Luther's Cover Letters

To the Esteemed and Reverend Master
NICHOLAS VON AMSDORF

Licentiate Of holy Scripture and Canon at Wittenberg,
my special and kind friend;

Doctor Martin Luther.

The grace and peace of God be with you, esteemed and reverend dear sir and friend.

The time to keep silence has passed and the time to (Eccl 3:7) speak is come, as says Ecclesiastes. I have followed out intention¹ and brought together some matters touching the reform of the Christian Estate, to be laid before the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, in the hope that may deign to help His Church through the efforts of the laity, since the clergy, to whom this task more properly belongs, have grown quite indifferent. I am sending the whole thing to your Reverence, that you may pass judgment on it and, if necessary, improve it.

I know full well that I shall not escape the charge of presumption in that I, a despised monk, venture to address such high and great Estates on matters of such moment, and to give advice to people of such high intelligence. I shall offer no apologies, no matter who may chide me. Perchance I owe my God and the world another pie of folly, and I have now made up my mind honestly to pay that debt, if I can do so, and for once to become court jester; if I fail, I still have one advantage, – no one need buy me a cap or cut me my comb.² It is a question which one will put the bells on the other.³ I must fulfill the proverb, “Whatever the world does, a monk must be it, even if he has to be painted in.”⁴ More than once a fool has spoken wisely, and wise men often have been arrant fools; as Paul says, “If anyone will be wise, let him become a fool,” (1Cor 3:18). Moreover since I am not only a fool, but also a sworn doctor of Holy Scripture, I am glad for the chant to fulfill my doctor's oath in this fool's way.

I pray you, make my excuses to the moderately intelligent, for I know not how to earn the grace and favor of the immoderately intelligent, though I have often sought to do with great pains. Henceforth I neither desire nor regard their favor. God help us to seek not our own glory, but His alone! Amen.

*Wittenberg, in the house of the Augustinians,
on the Eve of St. John the Baptist (June 23d),
in the year fifteen hundred and twenty.*

¹ *Unserm furnchmen nach*. See Introduction, p.57.

² An ironical comparison of the monks' cowl and tonsure with the headgear of the jester.

³ i.e., Which one turns out to be the real fool.

⁴ The proverb ran, *Monachus semper praesens*, “a monk is always there.” See WANDER, *Deutsches Sprichwörterlexicon*, under *Monch*, No. 130.

THE THREE WALLS OF THE ROMANISTS
Of The Matters To Be Considered In The Councils
Twenty-Seven Articles Respecting The Reformation Of The Christian Estate

**To His Most Illustrious and Mighty Imperial Majesty,
and to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,**

Doctor Martin Luther.

Grace and power from God, Most Illustrious Majesty, and most gracious and dear Lords.

It is not out of sheer forwardness or rashness that I, a single, poor man, have undertaken to address your worships. The distress and oppression which weigh down all the Estates of Christendom, especially of Germany, and which move not me alone, but everyone to cry out time and again, and to pray for help,⁵ have forced me even now to cry aloud that God may inspire someone with His Spirit to lend this suffering nation a helping hand. Oft times the councils⁶ made some presence at reformation, but their attempts have been cleverly hindered by the guile of certain men and things have gone from bad to worse. I now intend, by the help of God, to throw some light upon the wiles and wickedness of these men, to the end that when they are known, they may not henceforth be so hurtful and so great a hindrance. God has given us a noble youth to be our head and thereby has awakened great hopes of good in many hearts;⁷ wherefore it is fitting that we should do our part and profitably use this time of grace.

In this whole matter the first and most important thing is that we take earnest heed not to enter on it trusting great might or in human reason, even though all power in the world were ours; for God cannot and will not suffer a good work to be begun with trust in our own power or reason. Such works He crushes ruthlessly to earth, as it (Ps. 33:16) is written in the 23rd Psalm, "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." On this account, I fear, it came to pass of old that the good Emperors Frederick I⁸ and II⁹ and many other German emperors were shamefully oppressed and trodden under foot by the popes, although all the world feared them. It may be that they relied on own might more than on God, and therefore they had to fall. In our own times, too, what was it that raised the bloodthirsty Julius II¹⁰ to such heights? Nothing else, I fear, except that France, the Germans and Venice relied (Judges 20:21) upon themselves. The children of Benjamin slew 42,000 Israelites¹¹ because the latter relied on their own strength.

⁵ Evidently a reference to the Gravamina of the German Nation; See GEBHARDT, *Die Grav. Der Deutschen Nation*, Breslau, 1895.

⁶ Councils of the Church, especially those of Constance (1414-18), and of Basel (1431-39).

⁷ Charles V. was elected Emperor in 1519, when but twenty years of age. Hutten expresses his "hopes of good" from Charles in Vadiscus (BOCKING, IV, 156).

⁸ Frederick Barbarossa (1152-1190).

⁹ Frederick II (1212-1250), grandson of Barbarossa and last of the great Hohenstaufen Emperors. He died under excommunication.

¹⁰ Pope Julius II (1503-1513). Notorious among the popes for his unscrupulous pursuit of political power, he was continually involved in war with one and another of the European powers over the possession of territories in Italy.

¹¹ Luther's recollection of the figures was faulty.

That it may not so fare with us and our noble young Emperor Charles, we must be sure that in this matter are dealing not with men, but with the princes of hell, who can fill the world with war and bloodshed, but whom war and bloodshed do not overcome. We must go at this work despairing of physical force and humbly trusting God; we must seek God's help with earnest prayer, and fix our minds on nothing else than the misery and distress of suffering Christendom, without regard to the deserts of evil men. Otherwise we may start the game with great prospect of success, but when we get well into it the evil spirits will stir up such confusion that the whole world will swim in blood, and yet nothing will come of it. Let us act wisely, therefore, and in the fear of God. The more force we use, the greater our disaster if we do not act humbly and in God's fear. The popes and the Romans have hitherto been able, by the devil's help, to set kings at odds with one another, and they may well be able to do it again, if we proceed by our own might and cunning, without God's help.

I – THE THREE WALLS OF THE ROMANISTS

The Romanists,¹ with great adroitness, have built three walls about them, behind which they have hitherto defended themselves in such wise that no one has been able to reform them; and this has been the cause of terrible corruption throughout all Christendom.

First, when pressed by the temporal power, they have made decrees and said that the temporal power has no jurisdiction over them, but, on the other hand, that the spiritual is above the temporal power. Second, when the attempt is made to reprove them out of the Scriptures, they raise the objection that the interpretation of the Scriptures belongs to no one except the pope. Third, if threatened with a council, they answer with the fable that no one can call a council but the pope.

In this wise they have slyly stolen from us our three rods,² that they may go unpunished, and have ensconced themselves within the safe stronghold of these three walls, that they may practice all the knavery and wickedness which we now see. Even when they have been compelled to hold a council they have weakened its power in advance by previously binding the princes with an oath to let them remain as they are. Moreover, they have given the pope full authority over all the decisions of the council, so that it is all one whether there are many councils or no councils, – except that they deceive us with puppet-shows and sham-battles. So terribly do they fear for their skin in a really free council! And they have intimidated kings and princes by making them believe it would be an offense against God not to obey them in all these knavish, crafty deceptions.³

Josh. 6:20. Now God help us, and give us one of the trumpets with which the walls of Jericho were overthrown, that we may blow down these walls of straw and paper, and may set free the Christian rods for the punishment of sin, bringing to light the craft and deceit of the devil, to the end that through punishment we may reform ourselves, and once more attain God's favor.

The First Wall

That the Temporal Power has no Jurisdiction over the Spiritual Estate

Against the first wall we will direct our first attack.

It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the “spiritual estate”; princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the “temporal estate.” That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy. Yet no one should be frightened by it; and for this reason – viz., that all Christians are truly of the “spiritual estate,” and there is among them no difference at all but that of office, as Paul says in 1Cor 12:12, We are all one body, yet every member has its own work, whereby it

¹ The term “Romanist” is applied by Luther to the champions of the extreme form of papal supremacy, Cf. Vol. I, p. 343 f.

² i.e., The three rods for the punishment of an evil pope. Vol. II, – 5.

³ Spuknisse, literally “ghosts.” The gist of the sentence is, “the Romanists have frightened the world with ghost-stories.”

serves every other, all because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all alike Christians; for baptism, Gospel and faith alone make us “spiritual” and a Christian people.

But that a pope or a bishop anoints, confers tonsures; ordains, consecrates, or prescribes dress unlike that of the laity, this may make hypocrites and graven images,⁴ but it never makes a Christian or “spiritual” man. Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in 1Pet 2:9, “Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,” and the book of Revelation says, Rev. 5:10 “Thou have made us by your blood to be priests and kings.” For if we had no higher consecration than pope or bishop gives, the consecration by pope or bishop would never make a priest, nor might anyone either say mass or preach a sermon or give absolution. Therefore when the bishop consecrates it is the same thing as if he, in the place and stead of the whole congregation, all of whom have like power, were to take one out of their number and charge him to use this power for the others; just as though ten brothers, all king’s sons and equal heirs, were to choose one of themselves to rule the inheritance for them all, – they would all be kings and equal in power, though one of them would be charged with the duty of ruling.

To make it still clearer. If a little group of pious Christian laymen were taken captive and set down in a wilderness, and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if there in the wilderness they were to agree in choosing one of themselves, married or unmarried, and were to charge him with the office of baptizing, saying mass, absolving and preaching, such a man would be as truly a priest as though all bishops and popes had consecrated him. That is why in cases of necessity any one can baptize and give absolution,⁵ which would be impossible unless we were all priests. This great grace and power of baptism and of the Christian Estate they have well-nigh destroyed and caused us to forget through The canon law.⁶ It was in the manner aforesaid that Christians in olden days chose from their number bishops and priests, who were afterwards confirmed by other bishops, without all the show which now obtains. It was Thus that Sts. Augustine,⁷ Ambrose⁸ and Cyprian⁹ became bishops.

Since, then, the temporal authorities are baptized with the same baptism and have the same faith and Gospel as we, we must grant that they are priests and bishops, and count their office one which has a proper and a useful place in the Christian community. For whoever comes out the

⁴ Oelgotze - “an image anointed with holy oil to make it sacred”; in modern German, “a blockhead.”

⁵ Lay-baptism in view of imminent death is a practice as old as the Christian Church. The right of the laity to administer baptism in such cases was expressly recognized by the Council of Elvira, in the year 306, and the decree of that Council became a part of the law of the Church. The right of the laity to give absolution in such cases rests on the principle that in the absence of the appointed official of the Church any Christian can do for any other Christian the things that are absolutely necessary for salvation, for “necessity knows no law.” Cf. Vol. I, p. 30, note 2.

⁶ The canon law, called by Luther throughout this treatise and elsewhere, the “spiritual law,” is a general name for the decrees of councils (“cannons” in the strict sense) and decisions of the popes (“decretals,” “constitutions,” etc.), promulgated by authority of the popes, and collected in the so-called *Corpus juris canonici*. It comprised the whole body of Church law, and embodied in legal forms the medieval theory of papal absolutism, which accounts for the bitterness with which Luther speaks of it, especially in this treatise. The *Corpus* includes the following collections of canons and decretals: The *Decretum* of Gratian (1142), the *Liber Extra* (1234), the *Liber Sextus* (1298), the *Constitutiones Clementinae* (1318 or 1317), and the two books of *Extravagantes*, – the *Extravagantes* of John XXIV, and *youxtravagantes Communes*. The last pope whose decrees are included is Sixths IV (died 1484). See *Catholic Encyclo.*, IV, pp. 391 ff.

⁷ Augustine, the master-theologian of the Ancient Church, bishop of Hippo in Africa from 395-430.

⁸ Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374-397, had not yet been baptized at the time of his election to the episcopate, which was forced upon him by the unanimous voice of the people of the city.

⁹ Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, 247-258, is said to have consented to accept the office only when the congregation surrounded his house and besought him to yield to their entreaties.

water of baptism¹⁰ can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop and pope, though it is not seemly that everyone should exercise the office. No, just because we are all in like manner priests, no one must put himself forward and undertake, without our consent and election, to do what is in the power of all of us. For what is common to all, no one dare take upon himself without the will and the command of the community; and should it happen that one chosen for such an office were deposed for malfeasance, he would then be just what he was before he held office. Therefore a priest in Christendom is nothing else than an office-holder. While he is in office, he has precedence; when deposed, he is a peasant or a townsman like the rest. Beyond all doubt, then, a priest is no longer a priest when he is deposed. But now they have invented characters indelebilis,¹¹ and prate that a deposed priest is nevertheless something different from a mere layman. They even dream that a priest can never become a layman, or be anything else than a priest. All this is mere talk and man-made law.

From all this it follows that there is really no difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, “spirituals” and “temporals,” as they call them, except that of office and work, but not of “estate”; for they are all of the same estate,¹² – true priests, bishops and popes, – though they are not all engaged in the same work, just as all priests and monks have not the same work. This is the teaching of St. Paul in Romans 12:4 and 1Cor 12:12, and of St. Peter in 1Pet 2:9, as I have said above, viz., that we are all one body of Christ, the Head, all members one of another. Christ has not two different bodies, one “temporal ,” the other “spiritual.” He is one Head, and He has one body.

Therefore, just as Those who are now called “spiritual” – priests, bishops or popes – are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the Word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office, so it is with the temporal authorities, – they bear sword and rod with which to punish the evil and to protect die good. A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.

See, now, how Christian is the decree which says that the temporal power is not above the “spiritual estate” and may not punish it.¹³ That is as much as to say that the hand shall lend no

¹⁰ Was ausz der Tauff krochen ist.

¹¹ The character indelebilis, or “indelible mark,” received authoritative statement in the bull Exultate Deo (1439). Eugenius IV, summing up the Decrees of the Council of Florence, says: “Among these sacraments there are three – baptism, confirmation, and orders – which indelibly impress upon the soul a character, i.e., a certain spiritual mark which distinguishes them from the rest.” (MIRBT, Quellen, 2d ed., No. 150). The Council of Trent in its XXIII. Session, July 15, 1563. (MIRBT, No. 312), defined the correct Roman teaching as follows: “Since in the sacrament of orders, as in baptism and confirmation, a character is impressed which cannot be destroyed or taken away, the Holy Synod justly condemns the opinion of those who assert that the priests of the New Testament have only temporary power, and that those once rightly ordained can again be made laymen, if they do not exercise the ministry of the Word of God.”

¹² i.e., They are all Christians, among whom there can be no essential difference.

¹³ The sharp distinction which the Roman Church drew between clergy and laity found practical application in the contention that the clergy should be exempt from the jurisdiction of the civil courts, This is the so-called privilegium fori, “benefit of clergy.” It was further claimed that the government of the clergy and the administration of Church property must be entirely in the hands of the Church authorities, and that no lay rulers might either make or enforce laws which in any way affected the Church. See LEA, Studies in Church History, 169-219 and Prot. Realencyk., Vi, 594.

aid when the eye is suffering. Is it not unnatural, not to say unchristian, that one member should not help another and prevent its destruction? Verily, the more honorable the member, the more should the others help. I say then, since the temporal power is ordained of God to punish evildoers and to protect them that do well, it should therefore be left free to perform its office without hindrance through the whole body of Christendom without respect of persons, whether it affect pope, bishops, priests, monks, nuns or anybody else.¹⁴ For if the mere fact that the temporal power has a smaller place among the Christian offices than has the office of preachers or confessors, or of the clergy, then the tailors, cobblers, masons, carpenters, pot-boys, tapsters, farmers, and all the secular tradesmen, should also be prevented from providing pope, bishops, priests and monks with shoes, clothing, houses, meat and drink, and from paying them tribute. But if these laymen are allowed to do their work unhindered, what do the Roman scribes mean by their laws, with which they withdraw themselves from the jurisdiction of the temporal Christian power, only so that they may be free to do evil and to fulfill what St. Peter has said: 2. Peter 2:1 “There shall be false teachers among you, and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.”

On this account the Christian temporal power should exercise its office without let or hindrance, regardless whether it be pope, bishop or priest whom it affects; whoever is guilty, let him suffer. All that the canon law has said to the contrary is sheer invention of Roman presumption. For thus says St. Paul to all Christians: Romans 13:1, 4, “Let every soul (I take that to mean the pope’s soul also) be subject unto the higher powers; for they bear not the sword in vain, but are the ministers of God for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” St. Peter also says: 1Pet 2:13, 15 “Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, for so is the will of God” He has also prophesied that such men shall come as will despise the temporal authorities; and this has come to pass through the canon law.

So then, I think this first paper-wall is overthrown, since the temporal power has become a member of the body of Christendom, and is of the “spiritual estate,” though its work is of a temporal nature. Therefore its work should extend freely and without hindrance to all the members of the whole body; it should punish and use force whenever guilt deserves or necessity demands, without regard to pope, bishops and priests – let them hail threats and bans as much as they will.

Again, it is intolerable that in the canon law so much importance is attached to the freedom, life and property of the clergy, as though the laity were not also as spiritual as good Christians as they, or did not belong to the Church. Why are your life and limb, your property and honor so free, and mine not? We are all alike Christians, and have baptism, faith, Spirit and all things alike. If a priest is killed, the land is laid under interdict,¹⁵ – why not when a peasant is killed?

¹⁴ It was the contention of the Church authorities that priests charged with infraction of the laws of the state should first be tried in the ecclesiastical courts. If found guilty, they were degraded from the priesthood and handed over to the state authorities for punishment. Formula for degradation in the canon law, c. 2 in VI, de poen. (V, 9). See Prot. Realencyk., VI, 589.

¹⁵ The interdict is the prohibition of the administration of the sacraments and of the other rites of the Church within the territory upon which the interdict is laid (Realencyk., IX, 208 f.). Its use was not uncommon in the Middle Ages, and during the time that the power of the popes was at its height it proved an effective means of bringing refractory rulers to terms. A famous instance is the interdict laid upon the Kingdom of England by Innocent III in 1208. Interdicts of more limited local extent were quite frequent. The use of the interdict as punishment for trifling infractions of church law was a subject of complaint at the diets of Worms (1521) and Nurnberg (1524). See A. WREDE, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V.*, II, pp. 685 f, III, 665.

From where comes this great distinction between those who are equally Christians? Only from human laws and inventions!

Moreover, it can be no good spirit who has invented such exceptions and granted to sin such license and impunity. For if we are bound to strive against the works and words of the evil spirit, and to drive him out in whatever way we can, as Christ commands and His Apostles, ought we, then to suffer it in silence when the pope or his satellites are bent on devilish words and works? Ought we for the sake of men to allow the suppression of divine commandments and truths which we have sworn in baptism to support with life and limb? Of a truth we should then have to answer all the souls that would thereby be abandoned and it astray.

It must therefore have been the very prince of devils who said what is written in the canon law: “If the pope were so scandalously bad as to lead souls in crowds to the devil, yet he could not be deposed.”¹⁶ On this accursed and devilish foundation they build at Rome, and think that we should let all the world go to the devil, rather than resist their knavery. If the fact that one man is set over others were sufficient reason why he should escape punishment, then no Christian could punish another, since Christ commands that every man shall esteem himself the lowliest and the least.

Where sin is, there is no escape from punishment; as St. Gregory¹⁷ also writes that we are indeed all equal, but guilt puts us in subjection one to another. Now we see how they whom God and the Apostles have made subject to the temporal sword deal with Christendom, depriving it of its liberty by their own wickedness, without warrant of Scripture. It is to be feared that this is a game of Antichrist¹⁸ or a sign that he is close at hand.

The Second Wall

That no one may interpret the Scriptures but the Pope

The second wall¹⁹ is still more flimsy and worthless. They wish to be the only Masters of The Holy Scriptures,²⁰ even though in all their lives they learn nothing from them. They assume for themselves sole authority, and with insolent juggling of words they would persuade us that the pope, whether he be a bad man or a good man, cannot err in matters of faith,²¹ and yet they

¹⁶ The statement of which Luther here complains is found in the Decretum of Gratian, Dist. XL, c. 6, Si papa. In his Epitome (see Introduction, p. 58), Prierias had quoted this canon against Luther, as follows: “A Pontifex indubitatus (i.e., a pope who is not accused of heresy or schism) cannot lawfully be deposed or judged either by a council or by the whole world, even if he is so scandalous as to lead people with him by crowds into the possession of hell.” Luther’s comment is: “Be astonished, O heaven; shudder, O earth! Behold, O Christians, what Rome is!” (Weimar Ed., VI, 336).

¹⁷ Gregory the Great, pope 590-604. The passage is found in MIGEN, LXXVI, 203; LXXVII, 34.

¹⁸ Antichrist, the incarnation of all that is hostile to Christ and His Kingdom. His appearance is prophesied in 2 Thess. 2:3-10 (the “man of sin, sitting in the temple of God”); 1 John 2:18, 22:4:3, and Rev. 13. In the early Church the Fathers sometimes thought the prophecies fulfilled in the person of some especially pestilent heretic. Wyclif applied the term to the pope, – “the pope would seem to be not the vicar of Christ, but the vicar of Antichrist” (see LOOFS, *Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed., p. 649).

¹⁹ See above, p. 65.

²⁰ According to academic usage, the holder of a Master’s degree was authorized to expound the subject named in the degree.

²¹ The doctrine of papal infallibility was never officially sanctioned in the Middle Ages, but the claim of infallibility was repeatedly made by the champions of the more extreme view of papal power, e.g., Augustinus Triumphus (died 1328) in his *Summa de potestate Papae*. In his attack upon the XCV Theses (*Dialogus de potestate Papae*, Dec., 1517) Prierias had asserted,

cannot prove a single letter of it. Hence it comes that so many heretical and unchristian, no, even unnatural ordinances have a place in the canon law, of which, however, there is no present need to speak. For since they think that the Holy Spirit never leaves them, be they never so unlearned and wicked, they make bold to decree whatever they will. And if it were true, where would be the need or use of Holy Scriptures? Let us burn them, and be satisfied with the unlearned lords at Rome, who are possessed of the Holy Spirit, – although He can possess only pious hearts! Unless I had read it myself,²² I could not have believed that the devil would make such clumsy pretensions at Rome, and find a following.

But not to fight them with mere words, we will quote the Scriptures. St. Paul says in 1Cor 14:30: “If to anyone something better is revealed, though he be sitting and listening to another in God’s Word, then the first, who is speaking, shall hold his peace and give place.” What would be the use of this commandment, if we were only to believe him who does the talking or who has the highest seat? Christ also says in John 6:45, that all Christians shall be taught of God. Thus it may well happen that the pope and his followers are wicked men, and no true Christians, not taught of God, not having true understanding. On the other hand, an ordinary man may have true understanding; why then should we not follow him? Has not the pope erred many times? Who would help Christendom when the pope errs, if we were not to believe another, who had the Scriptures on his side, more than the pope?

Therefore it is a wickedly invented fable, and they cannot produce a letter in defense of it, that the interpretation of Scripture or the confirmation of its interpretation belongs to the pope alone. They have themselves usurped this power; and although they allege that this power was given to Peter when the keys were given to him, it is plain enough that the keys were not given to Peter alone, but to the whole community.²³ Moreover, the keys were not ordained for doctrine or government, but only for the binding and loosing of sin. What they arrogate to themselves is mere invention. But Christ’s word to Peter, Luke 22:32 “I have prayed for you that your faith fall not,” cannot be applied to the pope, since the majority of the popes have been without faith, as they must themselves confess. Besides, it is not only for Peter that Christ prayed, but also for all Apostles and Christians, as he says in John 17:9, 20: “Father, I pray for those whom you have given Me, and not for these only, but for all who believe on Me through their word.” Is not this clear enough?

Only think of it yourself! They must confess that there are pious Christians among us, who have the true faith, Spirit, understanding, word and mind of Christ. Why, then, should we reject their word and understanding and follow the pope, who has neither faith nor Spirit? That would be to deny the whole faith and the Christian Church. Moreover, it is not the pope alone who is always in the right, if the article of The Creed is correct: “I believe one holy Christian Church”;

“The supreme pontiff (i.e., the pope) cannot err when giving a decision as pontiff, i.e., speaking officially (*ex officio*), and doing what in him lies to learn the truth”; and again, “Whoever does not rest upon the teaching of the Roman Church and the supreme pontiff as an infallible rule of faith, from which even Holy Scripture draws its vigor and authority, is a heretic” (Erl. Ed., op. Var./arg., I, 348). In the Epitome he had said: “Even though the pope as an individual (*singularis persona*) can do wrong and hold a wrong faith, nevertheless as pope he cannot give a wrong decision” (Weimar Ed., VI, 337).

²² Most recently in Prierias’s Epitome. See preceding note.

²³ Luther had discussed the whole subject of the power of the keys in the Latin treatise, *Resolutio super propositione xiii. De potestate papae*, of 1519 (Weimar Ed., II, pp. 185 ff., and in the German treatise *The Papacy at Rome* (Vol. I, pp. 337-394).

otherwise the prayer must run: “I believe in the pope at Rome,” and so reduce the Christian Church to one man, – which would be nothing else than a devilish and hellish error.

Besides, if we are all priests, as was said above,²⁴ and all have one faith, one Gospel, one sacrament, why should we not also have the power to test and judge what is correct or incorrect in matters of faith? What becomes of the words of Paul in 1Cor 2:15: “He that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man,” 2Cor 4:13: “We have all the same Spirit of faith”? Why, then, should not we perceive what squares with faith and what does not, as well as does an unbelieving pope?

All these and many other texts should make us bold and free, and we should not allow the Spirit of liberty, as Paul calls Him, to be frightened off by the fabrications of the popes, but we ought to go boldly forward to test all that they do or leave undone, according to our interpretation of the Scriptures, which rests on faith, and compel them to follow not their own interpretation, but the one that is better. In the olden days Abraham had to listen to Sarah, although she was in more complete subjection to him than we are to anyone on earth. Balaam’s ass, also, was wiser than the prophet himself. If God then spoke an ass against a prophet, why should He not be able even now to speak by a righteous man against the pope? In like manner St. Paul rebukes St. Peter as a man in error. Therefore it behooves every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to rebuke errors.

The Third Wall

That no one may call a council but the Pope

The third wall falls of itself when the first two are down. For when the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by the Scriptures, to reprove him, and to constrain him, according to the word of Christ in Matthew 18:15: “If your brother sin against you, go and tell it him between you and him alone; if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more; if he will not hear them, tell it to the Church; if he will not hear the Church, consider him a heathen.” Here every member is commanded to care for every other. How much rather should we do this when the member that does evil is a ruling member, and by his evil-doing is the cause of much harm and offense to the rest! But if I am to accuse him before the Church, I must bring the Church together.

They have no basis in Scripture for their contention that it belongs to the pope alone to call a council or confirm its actions;²⁵ for this is based merely upon their own laws, which are valid only in so far as they are not injurious to Christendom or contrary to the laws of God. When the pope deserves punishment, such laws go out of force, since it is injurious to Christendom not to punish him by means of a council.

²⁴ Pp. 66 ff.

²⁵ Another contention of Prierias. In 1518 (Nov. 28th) Luther had appealed his cause from the decision of the pope, which he foresaw would be adverse, to the decision of a council to be held at some future time. In the Epitome Prierias discusses this appeal, asserting, among other things, that “when there is one undisputed pontiff, it belongs to him alone to call a council.”, and that “the decrees of councils neither bind nor hold (nullum ligant vel astringunt) unless they are confirmed by authority of the Roman pontiff” (Weimar Ed., Vi, 335).

Thus we read in Acts 15:6 that it was not St. Peter who called the Apostolic Council, but the Apostles and elders. If, then, that right had belonged to St. Peter alone, the council would not have been a Christian council, but an heretical *conciliabulum*.²⁶ Even the Council of Nicaea – the most famous of all – was neither called nor confirmed by the Bishop of Rome, but by the Emperor Constantine,²⁷ and many other emperors after him did the like, yet these councils were the most Christian of all.²⁸ But if the pope alone had the right to call councils, then all then all councils must have been heretical. Moreover, if I consider the councils which the pope has created, I find that they have done nothing of special importance.

Therefore, when necessity demands, and the pope is an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, a faithful member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council.²⁹ No one can do this so well as the temporal authorities, especially since now they also are fellow-Christians, fellow-priests, “fellow-spirituals,”³⁰ fellow-lords over all things, and whenever it is needful or profitable, they should give free course to office and work in which God has put them above every man. Would it not be an unnatural thing, if a fire broke out in a city, and everybody were to stand by and it burn on and on and consume everything that could burn, for the sole reason that nobody had the authority of the burgomaster, or because, perhaps, the fire broke in the burgomaster’s house? In such case is it not the duty of every citizen to arouse and call the rest? How much more should this be done in the spiritual city of Christ, if a fire of offense breaks out, whether in the papal government, or anywhere else? In the same way, if the enemy attacks a city, he who first rouses the others deserves honor and thanks; why then should he not deserve honor who makes known the presence of the enemy from hell, awakens the Christians, and calls them together?

But all their boasts of an authority which dare not opposed amount to nothing after all. No one in Christendom has authority to do injury, or to forbid the resisting of injury. There is no authority in the Church save edification. Therefore, if the pope were to use his authority to prevent the calling of a free council, and thus became a hindrance to the edification of the Church, we should have regard neither for him nor for his authority; and if he were to hurl his bans and thunderbolts, we should despise his conduct as that of a madman, and relying on God, hurl back the ban on him, and coerce him as best we could. For this presumptuous authority of his is nothing; he has no such authority, and he is quickly overthrown by a text of Scripture; for Paul says to the Corinthians, 2Cor 10:8 “God has given us authority not for the destruction, but for the edification of Christendom.” Who is ready to overleap this text? It is only the power of the devil and of Antichrist which resists the things that serve for the edification of Christendom; it is, therefore, in no wise to be obeyed, but is to be opposed with life and goods and all our strength.

²⁶ i.e., A mere gathering of people.

²⁷ The council of Nicaea, the first of the great councils of the Church, assembled in 325 for the settlement of the Arian controversy. Luther’s statement that it was called by the Emperor Constantine, and that its decisions did not derive their validity from any papal confirmation, is historically correct. On Luther’s statements about this council, see SCHAFFER, Luther als Kirchenhistoriker, pp. 291 ff.; KOHLER, Luther und die Kg., pp. 148 ff.

²⁸ Luther is here referring to the earlier so-called “ecumenical” councils.

²⁹ i.e., A council which will not be subject to the pope. Cf. Erl. Ed., xxvi, III

³⁰ i.e., They belong to the “spiritual estate”; see above, p.69.

Even though a miracle were to be done in the pope's behalf against the temporal powers, or though someone were to be stricken with a plague – which they boast has sometimes happened – it should be considered only the work of the devil, because of the weakness of our faith in God. Christ Himself prophesied in Matthew 24:24: “There shall come in My Name false christs and false prophets, and do signs and wonders, so as to deceive even the elect,” and Paul says in 2Thess 2:9, that Antichrist shall, through the power of Satan, be mighty in lying wonders.

Let us, therefore, hold fast to this: No Christian authority can do anything against Christ; as St. Paul says, 2Cor 13:8: “We can do nothing against Christ, but for Christ.” Whatever does anything against Christ is the power of Antichrist and of the devil, even if it were to rain and hail wonders and plagues. Wonders and plagues prove nothing, especially in these last evil times, for which all the Scriptures prophesy false wonders. Therefore we must cling with firm faith to the words of God, and then the devil will cease from wonders.

Thus I hope that the false, lying terror with which the Romans have this long time made our conscience timid and stupid, has been allayed. They, like all of us, are subject to the temporal sword; they have no power to interpret the Scriptures by mere authority, without learning; they have no authority to prevent a council or, in sheer wantonness, to pledge it, bind it, or take away its liberty; but if they do this, they are in truth the communion of Antichrist and of the devil, and have nothing at all of Christ except the name.

II – ABUSES TO BE DISCUSSED IN COUNCILS

We shall now look at the matters which should be discussed in the councils, and with which popes, cardinals, bishops and all the scholars ought properly to be occupied day and night if they loved Christ and His Church. But if they neglect this duty, then let the laity¹ and the temporal authorities see to it, regardless of bans and thunders; for an unjust ban is better than ten just releases, and an unjust release worse than ten just bans. Let us, therefore, awake, dear Germans, and fear God rather than men, that we may not share the fate of all the poor souls who are so lamentably lost through the shameful and devilish rule of the Romans, in which the devil daily takes a larger and larger place, – if, indeed, it were possible that such a hellish rule could grow worse, a thing I can neither conceive nor believe.

1. It is a horrible and frightful thing that the ruler of Christendom, who boasts himself vicar of Christ and successor of St. Peter, lives in such worldly splendor that in this regard no king nor emperor can equal or approach him, and that he who claims the title of “most holy” and “most spiritual” is more worldly than the world itself. He wears a triple crown, when the greatest kings wear but a single crown;² if that is like the poverty of Christ and of St. Peter, then it is a new kind of likeness. When a word is said against it, they cry out “Heresy!” but that is because they do not wish to hear how unchristian and ungodly such a practice is. I think, however, that if the pope were with tears to pray to God, he would have to lay aside these crowns, for our God can suffer no pride; and his office is nothing else than this, – daily to weep and pray for Christendom, and to set an example of all humility.

However that may be, this splendor of his is an offense, and the pope is bound on his soul’s salvation to lay it aside, because St. Paul says, 1Thess. 5:21: “Abstain from all outward shows, which give offense,” and in Romans 12:17, “We should provide good, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men.” An ordinary bishop’s crown would be enough for the pope; he should be greater than others in wisdom and holiness, and leave the crown of pride to Antichrist, as did his predecessors several centuries ago. They say he is a lord of the world; that is a lie; for Christ, Whose vicar and officer he boasts himself to be, said before Pilate, John 17:36, “My kingdom is not of this world,” and no vicar’s rule can go beyond his lord’s. Moreover he is not the vicar of the glorified, but of the crucified Christ, as Paul says, 1Cor 2:2, “I was willing to know nothing among you save Christ, and Him only as the Crucified”; and in Phil 2:5, “So think of yourselves as you see in Christ, Who emptied Himself and took upon Him the appearance of a servant”; and again in 1Cor 1:23, “We preach Christ, the Crucified.” Now they make the pope a vicar of the glorified Christ in heaven, and some of them have allowed the devil to rule them so completely that they have maintained that the pope is above the angels in heaven and has authority over them.³ These are indeed the very works of the very Antichrist.

¹ Der Haufe, i.e. Christians considered en masse, without regard to official position in the Church.

² The papal crown dates from the XI Century: the triple crown, or tiara, from the beginning of the XIV. It was intended to signify that very superiority of the pope to be rulers of this world, of which Luther here complains. See Realencyk., X, 532, and literature there cited.

³ A statement made by Augustinus Triumphus. See above, p.73, note 5; and below, p. 246. Vol. II.-6.

What is the use in Christendom of those people who are called the cardinals? I shall tell you. Italy and Germany have many rich monasteries, foundations, benefices, and livings. No better way has been discovered to bring all these to Rome than by creating cardinals and giving them the bishoprics, monasteries and prelaties, and so overthrowing the worship of God. For this reason we now see Italy a very wilderness – monasteries in ruins, bishoprics devoured, the prelaties and the revenues of all the churches drawn to Rome, cities decayed, land and people laid waste, because there is no more worship or preaching. Why? The cardinals must have the income.⁴ No Turk could have so devastated Italy and suppressed the worship of God.

Now that Italy is sucked dry, they come into Germany,⁵ and begin oh, so gently. But let us beware, or Germany will soon become like Italy. Already we have some cardinals; what the Romans seek by that the “drunken Germans” are not to understand until we have not a bishopric, a monastery, a living, a benefice, a heller or a pfennig left. Antichrist must take the treasures of the earth, as it was prophesied. So it goes on. They skim the cream off the bishoprics, monasteries and benefices, and because they do not yet venture to turn them all to shameful use, as they have done in Italy, they only practice for the present the sacred trickery of coupling together ten or twenty prelaties and taking a yearly portion from each of them, so as to make a tidy sum after all. The priory of Wurzburg yields a thousand gulden; that of Bamberg something; Mainz, Trier and the others, something more; and so from one to ten thousand gulden might be got together, in order that a cardinal might live at Rome like a rich king.

“After they are used to this, we will create thirty or forty cardinals in a day,⁶ and give to one Mount St. Michael at Bamberg⁷ and the bishopric of Wurzburg to boot, hang on to these a few rich livings, until churches and cities are waste, and after that we will say, ‘We are Christ’s vicars and shepherds of Christ’s sheep; the mad, drunken Germans must put up with it.’”

I advise, however, that the number of the cardinals be reduced, or that the pope be made to keep them at his own expense. Twelve of them would be more than enough, and each of them might have an income of a thousand gulden a year.⁸ How comes it that we Germans must put up with such robbery and such extortion of our property, at the hands of the pope? If the Kingdom of France has prevented it,⁹ why do we Germans let them make such fools and apes of us? It would all be more bearable if in this way they only stole our property; but they lay waste the churches and rob Christ’s sheep of their pious shepherds, and destroy the worship and the Word of God. Even if there were not a single cardinal, the Church would not go under. As it is they do nothing

⁴ The Cardinal della Rovere, afterwards Pope Julius II, held at one time the archbishopric of Avignon, the bishoprics of Bologna, Lausanne, Coutances, Viviers, Mende, Ostia and Velletri, and the abbacies of Nonantola, and Grottaferrata. This is but one illustration of the scandalous pluralism practiced by the cardinals. Cf. LEA, in *Cambridge Mod. Hist.*, I, pp. 659 f.

⁵ The complaint that the cardinals were provided with incomes by appointment to German benefices goes back to the Council of Constance (1415). Cf. BENRATH, p. 87, note 17.

⁶ The creation of new cardinals was a lucrative proceeding for the popes. On July 31, 1517, Leo X created thirty-one cardinals, and is said to have received from the new appointees about 300,000 ducats. Needless to say, the cardinals expected to make up the fees out of the income of their livings. See Weimar Ed., VI, 417, note I, and PASTOR, *Gesch. der Papste IV*, I, 137. Cf. Hutten’s *Vadiscus* (Bocking IV, 188).

⁷ The famous Benedictine monastery just outside the city of Bamberg.

⁸ The proposal made at Constance (see above, p. 82, note 2) was more generous. It suggested a salary of three to four thousand gulden.

⁹ As early as the XIV Century both England and France had enacted laws prohibiting the very practices of which Luther here complains. It should be noted, however, that these laws were enforced only occasionally, and never very strictly.

for the good of Christendom; they only wrangle about the incomes of bishoprics and prelacies, and that any robber could do.

If ninety-nine parts of the papal court¹⁰ were done away and only the hundredth part allowed to remain, it would still be large enough to give decisions in matters of faith. Now, however, there is such a swarm of vermin yonder in Rome, all boasting that they are “papal,” that there was nothing like it in Babylon. There are more than three thousand papal secretaries alone; who will count the other offices, when they are so many that they scarcely can be counted? And they all lie in wait for the prebends and benefices of Germany as wolves lie in wait for the sheep. I believe that Germany now gives much more to the sheep. I believe that Germany now gives much more to the pope at Rome than it gave in former times to the emperors. Indeed, some estimate that every year more than three hundred thousand gulden find their way from Germany to Rome, quite uselessly and fruitlessly; we get nothing for it but scorn and contempt. And yet we wonder that princes, nobles, cities, endowments, land and people are impoverished! We should rather wonder that we still have anything to eat!

Since we here come to the heart of the matter, we will pause a little, and let it be seen that the Germans are not quite such gross fools as not to note or understand the sharp practices of the Romans. I do not now complain that at Rome God’s command and Christian law are despised; for such is the state of Christendom, and particularly of Rome, that we may not now complain of such high matters. Nor do I complain that natural or temporal law and reason count for nothing. The case is worse even than that. I complain that they do not keep their own self-devised canon law, though it is, to be sure, mere tyranny, avarice and temporal splendor, rather than law. Let us see!

In former times German emperors and princes permitted the pope to receive the annates from all the benefices of the German nation, i.e., the half of the first year’s revenues from each benefice.¹¹ This permission was given, however, in order that by means of these large sums of money, the pope might accumulate a treasure for fighting against the Turks and infidels in defense of Christendom, so that the burden of the war might not rest too heavily upon the nobility, but that the clergy also should contribute something toward it. This single-hearted devotion of the German nation the popes have so used, that they have received this money for

¹⁰ The papal court or curia consisted of all the officials of various sorts who were employed in the transaction of papal business, including those who were in immediate attendance upon the person of the pope, the so-called “papal family.” On the number of such officials in the XVI Century, see BENRATH, p. 88, note 18, where reference is made to 949 offices, exclusive of those which had to do with the administration of the city of Rome and of the States of the Church, and not including the members of the pope’s “family.” The Gravamina of 1521 complain that the increase of these office in recent years has added greatly to the financial burdens of the German Church (WREDE, *Deutsche Reichstagakten unter Kaiser Karl V.*, II, 675).

¹¹ On the annates, see Vol. I, p. 383, note I. Early in their history, which dates from the beginning of the XIV, Century, the annates (*fructus medii temporis*) had become a fixed tax on all the Church offices which fell vacant, and the complaint of extortion in their appraisal and collection was frequently raised. The Council of Constance restricted the obligation to bishoprics and abbasies, and such other benefices as had a yearly income of more than 24 gulden. The Council of Basel (1439) resolved to abolish them entirely, but the resolution of the Council was inoperative, and in the Concordat of Vienna (1448) the German nation agreed to abide by the decision of Constance. On the use of the term “annates” to include other payments to the curia, especially the *servitia*, see *Catholic Encyclopedia*, I, pp. 537 f. Luther here alleges that the annates are not applied to their ostensible purpose, viz. , the Crusade. This charge is repeated in the Gravamina of the German Nation presented to the Diet of Worms (1521), with the additional allegation that the amount demanded in the way of annates had materially increase (A. WREDE, *Deutsche Reichstagakten unter Kaiser Karl V.*, II, pp. 675 f.). Similar complaints had been made at the Diet of Augsburg (1518), and were repeated at the Diet of Nurnberg (WREDE, *op. Cit.*, III, 660). Hutten calls the annates “a good fat robbery” (ed. Bocking, IV, 207). In England the annates were abolished by Act of Parliament (April 10, 1532)

more than a hundred years, have now made of it a binding tax and tribute, and have not only accumulated no treasure, but have used the money to endow many orders and offices at Rome, and to provide these offices with salaries, as though the annates were a fixed rent. When they pretend that they are about to fight against the Turks, they send out emissaries to gather money. Often they issue an indulgence on this same pretext of fighting the Turks,¹² for they think the mad Germans are forever to remain utter and arrant fools, give them money without end, and satisfy their unspeakable greed; though we clearly see that not a heller of the annates or of the indulgence-money or of all the rest, is used against the Turks, but all of it goes into the bottomless bag. They lie and deceive, make laws and make agreements with us, and they do not intend to keep any of them. All this must be counted the work of Christ and St. Peter! Now, in this matter the German nation, bishops and princes, should consider that they too are Christians, and should protect the people, whom they are set to rule and guard in things temporal and spiritual, against these ravening wolves who, in sheep's clothing, pretend to be shepherds and rulers; and, since the annates are so shamefully abused and the stipulated conditions are not fulfilled, they should not permit their land and people to be so sadly robbed and ruined, against all justice; but by a law of the emperor or of the whole nation, they should either keep the annates at home or else abolish them again.¹³ For since the Romans do not keep the terms of the agreement, they have no right to the annates. Therefore the bishops and princes are bound to punish or prevent; such thievery and robbery, as the law requires.

In this they should aid the pope and support him, for he is perchance too weak to prevent such an abuse all by himself; or if he were to undertake to defend and maintain this practice, they ought resist him and fight against him as against a wolf and a tyrant, for he has no authority to do or to defend evil. Moreover, if it were ever desired to accumulate such a treasure against the Turks, we ought in the future to have sense enough to see that the German nation would be a better custodian for it than the pope; for the German nation has people enough for the fighting, if only the money is forthcoming. It is with the annates as it has been with many another Roman pretence. Again, the year has been so divided between the pope and the ruling bishops and canons,¹⁴ that the pope has six months in the year – every other month – in which to bestow the benefices which fall vacant in his months.¹⁵ In this way almost all the benefices are absorbed by Rome, especially the very best livings and dignities,¹⁶ and when once they fall into the hands of Rome, they never come out of them again, though a vacancy may never again occur in the pope's month. Thus the canons are cheated. This is a genuine robbery, which intends to let

¹² On the crusading – indulgences, see Vol. I, p. 18.

¹³ i.e., As was done by the Council of Basel. See above, p. 84, note 1.

¹⁴ The canons are the clergy attached to a cathedral church who constituted the “chapter” of that cathedral, and to whom the right to elect the bishop normally belonged.

¹⁵ This whole section deals with the abuse of the “right of reservation,” i.e., the alleged right of the pope to appoint directly to vacant church positions. According to papal theory the right of appointment belonged absolutely to the pope, who graciously yielded the right to others under certain circumstances, reserving it to himself in other cases. The practice of reserving the appointments seems to date from the XII Century, and was originally an arbitrary exercise of papal authority. The rules which came to govern the reservation of appointments were regarded as limitations upon the authority of the pope. The rule of the “papal months,” as it obtained in Germany in Luther's time, is found in the Concordat of Vienna of 1448 (MIRBT, Quellen, 2d ed., NO. 261, pp. 167 f.). It provides that livings, with the exception of the higher dignities in the cathedrals and the chief posts in the monasteries, which fall vacant in the months of February, April, June, August, October and December, shall be filled by the ordinary methods-elections, presentation, appointment by the bishop, etc. - but that vacancies occurring in the other months shall be filled by appointment of the pope.

¹⁶ i.e., Church offices which carried with them certain rights of jurisdiction and gave their possessors a certain honorary precedence over other officials of the Church. See MEYER in Realencyk., IV, 658.

nothing escape. Therefore it is high time that the “papal months” be altogether abolished, and that everything which they have brought to Rome be taken back again. For the princes and nobles should take measures that the stolen goods be returned, the thieves punished, and those who have abused privilege be deprived of privilege. If it is binding and valid when the pope on the day after his election makes, in his chancery, rules and laws whereby our foundations and livings are robbed, – a thing which he has no right to do; then it should be still more valid if the Emperor Charles on the day after his coronation¹⁷ were to make rules and laws that not another benefice or living in all Germany shall be allowed to come into the hands of Rome by means of the “papal months,” and that the livings which have already fallen into its hands shall be released, and redeemed from the Roman robbers; for he has this right by virtue of his office and his sword.

But now the Roman See of Avarice and Robbery has not been able to await the time when all the benefices, one after another, would, by the “papal months,” come into its power, but hastens, with insatiable appetite, to get possession of them all as speedily as possible; and so besides the annates and the “months” it has hit upon a device by which benefices and livings fall to Rome in three ways:

First, If any one who holds a free living¹⁸ dies at Rome or on the way to Rome, his living must forever belong to the Roman See – I should rather say the robbing;¹⁹ and yet they will not be called robbers though they are guilty of such robbery as no one has ever heard or read about.

Second, In case anyone who belongs to the household of the pope or of the cardinals²⁰ holds or takes over a benefice, or in case one who already holds a benefice afterwards enters the “household” of the pope or of a cardinal; but who can count the “household” of the pope and of the cardinals, when the pope, if he only goes on a pleasure-ride, takes with him three or four thousand mule-riders, eclipsing all emperors and kings? Christ and St. Peter went on foot in order that their vicars might have the more pomp and splendor. Now avarice has cleverly thought out another scheme, and brings it to pass that even here many; have the name of “papal servant,” just as though they were in Rome; all in order that in every place the mere rascally little word “papal servant” may bring all benefices to Rome and tie them fast there forever. Are not these vexatious and devilish inventions? Let us beware! Soon Mainz; Madgeburg and Halberstadt will gently pass into the hands of Rome, and the cardinalate will be paid for dearly enough.²¹ “Afterwards we will make all the German bishops cardinal so that there will be nothing left outside.”

¹⁷ Charles V, though elected emperor, was not crowned until October 22d.

¹⁸ i.e., A living which has not hitherto been filled by papal appointment.

¹⁹ This rule, like that of the “papal months,” is found in the Concordat of Vienna. Luther’s complaint is reiterated in the Gravamina of 1521. (WREDE, Deutsche Reichstagsakten, etc., II, 673.)

²⁰ Des Papstes und der Cardinale Gesinde, i.e., all those who were counted members of the “family” or “household” (called Dienstverwandte in the Gravamina of 1521) of the pope or of any of the cardinals. The term included those who were in immediate attendance upon the pope or the cardinals, and all those to whom, by virtue of any special connection with the curia, the name “papal servant” could be made to apply. These are the “courtesans” to whom Luther afterwards refers.

²¹ In 1513 Albrecht of Brandenburg was made Archbishop of Madgeburg and later in the same year Administrator of Halberstadt; in 1514 he became Archbishop of Mainz as well. In 1518 he was made cardinal.

Third, When a contest has started at Rome over a benefice.²² This I hold to be almost the commonest and widest road for bringing livings to Rome. For when there is no contest at home, unnumbered knaves will be found at Rome to dig up contests out of the earth and assail livings at their will. Thus many a good priest has to lose his living, or settle the contest for a time by the payment of a sum of money.²³ Such a living rightly or wrongly contested must also belong forever to the Roman See. It would be no wonder if God were to rain from heaven fire and brimstone and to sink Rome in the abyss, as He did Sodom and Gomorrah of old. Why should there be a pope in Christendom, if his power is used for nothing else than such arch-knavery, and if he protects and practices it? O noble princes and lords, how long will you leave your lands and people naked to these ravening wolves!

Since even these practices were not enough, and Avarice grew impatient at the long time it took to get hold of all the bishoprics, therefore my Lord Avarice devised the fiction that the bishoprics should be nominally abroad, but that their land and soil should be at Rome, and no bishop can be confirmed unless with a great sum of money he buy the pallium,²⁴ and bind himself with terrible oaths to the pope's servant.²⁵ This is the reason that no bishop ventures to act against the pope. That, too, is what the Romans were seeking when they imposed the oath, and thus the very richest bishoprics have fallen into debt and ruin. Mainz pays, as I hear, 20,000 gulden. These are your Romans! To be sure they decreed of old in the canon law that the pallium should be bestowed gratis, the number of papal servants diminished, the contest lessened, the chapters²⁶ and bishops allowed their liberty. But this did not bring in money, and so they turned over a new leaf, and all authority was taken from the bishops and chapters; they are made ciphers, and have no office nor authority nor work, but everything is ruled by the arch-knaves at Rome; soon they will have in hand even the office of sexton and bell-ringer in all the churches. All contests are brought to Rome, and by authority of the pope everyone does as he likes.

What happened this very year? The Bishop of Strassburg²⁷ wished to govern his chapter properly and to institute reforms in worship, and with this end in view made certain godly and Christian regulations. But my dear Lord Pope and the Holy Roman See, at the instigation of the priests, overthrew and altogether condemned this holy and spiritual ordinance. This is called "feeding the sheep of Christ!" Thus priests are to be encouraged against their own bishop, and their disobedience to divine law is to be protected! Antichrist himself, I hope, will not dare to put God

²² This rule, like the others mentioned above, is contained in the Concordat of Vienna.

²³ Cf. The Gravamina of 1521, NO. 20, Von anfechtung der cordissanen (see above, p.88, note 3), where the name cordissei is applied to the practice of attacking titles to benefices. (WREDE, op. Cit., II, pp. 677 f.)

²⁴ The pallium is a woolen shoulder-cape which is the emblem of the archbishop's office, and which must be secured from Rome. The bestowal of the pallium by the pope is a very ancient custom. Gregory I (590-604) mentions it as *prisca consuetudo* (Dist., C.c. 3). The canon law prescribes (Dist. C.c. 1) that the archbishop-elect must secure the pallium from Rome within three months of his election; otherwise he is forbidden to discharge any of the duties of his office. It is regarded as the necessary complement of his election and consecration, conferring the "plenitude of the pontifical office," and the name of archbishop. Luther's charge that it had to be purchased "with a great sum of money" is substantiated by similar complaints from the XII Century on, though the language of the canon law makes it evident that Luther's other contention is also correct, viz., that the pallium was originally bestowed gratis. The sum required from the different archbishops varied with the wealth of their see, and was a fixed sum in each case. The Gravamina of 1521 complain that the price has been raised "Although according to ancient ordinance the bishoprics of Mainz, Cologne, Salzburg, etc., were bound to pay for the pallium about 10,000 gulden and no more, they can now scarcely get a pallium from Rome for 20 or 24 thousand gulden." (WREDE, op. Cit., II, 675.)

²⁵ The oath of allegiance to the pope was required before the pallium could be bestowed (Dist. C.c. 1). The canon law describes this oath as one "of allegiance, obedience and unity" (X, I, 6, c. 4).

²⁶ See above, p.86. note 2.

²⁷ cf. Luther to Spalatin, June 25, 152. (ENDERS, II, 424; SMITH, NO. 271).

to such open shame! There you have your pope after your own heart! Why did he do this? Ah! If one church were reformed, it would be a dangerous departure; Rome's turn too might come! Therefore it were better that no priest should be left at peace with another, that kings and princes should be set at odds, as has been the custom heretofore, and the world filled with the blood of Christians, only so the concord of Christians should not trouble the Holy Roman See with a reformation. So far we have been getting an idea of how they deal with livings which become vacant. But for tender-hearted Avarice the vacancies are too few, and so he brings his foresight to bear upon the benefices which are still occupied by their incumbents, so that they must be unfilled., even they are not unfilled.²⁸ And this he does in many ways, as follows:

First, He lies in wait for fat prebends or bishoprics which are held by an old or a sick man, or by one with an alleged disability. To such an incumbent, without his desire or consent, the Holy See gives a coadjutor's i.e., an "assistant," for the coadjutor's benefit, because he is "papal servant," or has paid for the position, or has earned it by some other ignoble service to Rome. In this case the rights of the chapter or the rights of him who has the bestowal of the living²⁹ must be surrendered, and the whole thing fall into the hands of Rome.

Second, There is a little word commend,³⁰ by which the pope entrusts the keeping of a rich, fat monastery or church to a cardinal or to another of his people, just as though I were to give you a hundred gulden to keep. This is not called the giving or bestowing of the monastery nor even its destruction, or the abolition of the worship of God, but only "giving it into keeping"; not that he to whom it is entrusted is to care for it, or build it up, but he is to drive out the incumbent, to receive the goods and revenues, and to install some apostate, renegade monk,³¹ who accepts five or six gulden a year and sits in the church all day selling pictures and images to the pilgrims, so that henceforth neither prayers nor masses are said there. If this were to be called destroying monasteries and abolishing the worship of God, then the pope would have to be called a destroyer of Christendom and an abolisher of God's worship, because this is his constant practice. That would be a hard saying at Rome, and so we must call it a *commend* or a "command to take charge" of the monastery. The pope can every year make commends out of four or more of these monasteries, a single one of which may have an income of more than six thousand gulden. This is the way the Romans increase the worship of God and preserve the monasteries. The Germans also are beginning to find it out.

Third, There are some benefices which they call *incompatibilia*,³² and which, according to the ordinances of the canon law, cannot be held by one man at the same time, as for instance, two parishes, two bishoprics and the like. In these cases the Holy Roman See of Avarice evades the

²⁸ i.e., The benefices are treated as though they were vacant.

²⁹ In the case of certain endowed benefices the right of nominate the incumbent was vested in individuals, usually of the nobility, and was hereditary in their family. This is the so-called *jus patronum*, or "right of patronage. The complaint that this right is disregarded is frequent in the *Gravamina* of 1521.

³⁰ Commendation was one of the practices by which the pope evaded the provision of the canon law which prescribed that the same man should not hold two livings with the cure of souls. The man who received an office *in commendam* was not required to fulfill the duties attached to the position and when a living or an abbacy was granted in this way during the incumbency of another, the recipient received its entire income during a subsequent vacancy. The practice was most common in the case of abbacies. At the Diet of Worms (1521), Duke George of Saxony, an outspoken opponent of Luther, was as emphatic in his protest against this practice as Luther himself (WREDE, op. cit., II, 665); his protest was incorporated in the *Gravamina* (ibid., 672), and reappears in the Appendix (ibid., 708).

³¹ A monk who deserted his monastery was known as an "apostate."

³² i.e., Offices which cannot be united in the hands of one man. See e.g., note 3, p. 91.

canon law by making “glosses,”³³ called *unio* and *incorporatio*, i.e., by “incorporating” many *incompatibilia*, so that each becomes a part of every other and all of them together are looked upon as though they were one living. They are then no longer “incompatible,” and the holy canon law is satisfied, in that it is no longer binding, except upon those who do not buy these “glosses,”³⁴ from the pope or his datarius.³⁵ The *unio*, i.e., “uniting,” is of the same nature. The pope binds many such benefices together like a bundle of sticks, and by virtue of this bond they are all regarded as one benefice. So there is at Rome one courtesan³⁶ who holds, for himself alone, 22 parishes, 7 priories and 44 canonries besides, – all by the help of that masterly “gloss,” which holds that this is not illegal. What cardinals and other prelates have, everyone may imagine for himself. In this way the Germans are to have their purses eased and their itch cured. Another of the “glosses” is the *administratio*, i.e., a man may have beside his bishopric, an abbacy or a dignity,³⁷ and possess all the property which goes with it, only he has no other title than that of “administrator.”³⁸ For at Rome it is sufficient that words are changed and not the things they stand for; as though I were to teach that a bawdy-house keeper should have the name of “burgomaster’s wife,” and yet continue to ply her trade.

This kind of Roman rule St. Peter foretold when he said, in 2Pet 2:3: “There shall come false teachers, who in covetousness, with feigned words, shall make merchandise of you, to get their gains.” Again, dear Roman Avarice has invented the custom of selling and bestowing livings to such advantage that the seller or disposer retains reversionary rights,³⁹ upon them; to wit, if the incumbent dies, the benefice freely reverts to him who previously sold, bestowed or surrendered it. In this way they have made livings hereditary property, so that henceforth no one can come into possession of them, except the man to whom the seller is willing to dispose of them, or to whom he bequeaths his rights at death. Besides, there are many who transfer to others the mere title to a benefice from which those who get the title derive not a heller of income. It is now an old custom, too, to give another man a benefice and to reserve a certain part out of the annual revenue.⁴⁰ In olden times this was simony.⁴¹ Of these things there are so many more that they cannot all be counted. They treat livings more shamefully than the heathen beneath the cross

³³ A gloss is a note explanatory of a word or passage of doubtful meaning. The glosses are the earliest form of commentary on the Bible. The glosses of the canon law are the more or less authoritative comments of the teachers, and date from the time when the study of the canon law became a part of the theological curriculum. Their aim is chiefly to show how the law applies to practical case which may arise. The so-called *glossa ordinaria* had in Luther’s time an authority almost equal to that of the *corpus juris* itself. Cf. Cath. Encyc., Vi, pp. 588f.

³⁴ The thing which was bought was, of course, the dispensation, or permission to avail oneself of the gloss.

³⁵ Dataria is the name for that department of the curia which had to deal with the granting of dispensations and the disposal of benefices. Datarius is the title of the official who presided over this department.

³⁶ See above, p.88, note 2. For a catalogue of papal appointments bestowed upon two “courtesans,” Johannes Zink und Johannes Ingenwinkel, see SCHULTE, Die Fugger in Rom, I, pp. 282 ff. Between 1513 and 1521, Zink received 56 appointments, and Ingenwinkel received, between 1496 and 1521, no fewer than 106.

³⁷ See above, p. 87, note 1.

³⁸ So Albrecht of Mainz bore the title of “administrator” of Halberstadt.

³⁹ The name of this practice was “regression” (*regressus*).

⁴⁰ The complaint was made at Worms (1521) that it was impossible for a German to secure a clear title to a benefice at Rome unless he applied for it in the name of an Italian, to whom he was obliged to pay a percentage of the income, a yearly pension, or a fixed sum of money for the use of his name (WREDE, op. Cit., II, 712).

⁴¹ Simony – the sin of Simon Magus (Acts 8:18-20) – the sin committed by the sale or the purchase of an office or position which is formally conferred by a ritual act of the Church. In the ancient and earlier medieval Church the use of money to secure preferment was held to invalidate the title of the guilty party to the position thus secured, and the acceptance of money for such a purpose was an offense punishable by deposition and degradation. The “heresy of Simon” was conceived to be the greatest of all heresies. The traffic in Church offices, which became a flagrant abuse from the time of John XXII (1316-1334), would have been regarded in earlier days as the most atrocious simony.

treated the garments of Christ. Yet all that has hitherto been said is ancient history and an everyday occurrence at Rome. Avarice has devised one thing more, which may, I hope, be his last morsel, and choke him.

The pope has a noble little device called *pectoralis reservatio*, i.e., his “mental reservation,” and *proprius motus*, i.e., the “arbitrary will of his authority.”⁴² It goes like this. When one man has gotten a benefice at Rome, and the appointment has been regularly signed and sealed, according to custom, and there comes another, who brings money, or has laid the pope under obligation in some other way, of which we will not speak, and desires of the pope the same benefice, then the pope takes it from the first man and gives it to the second.⁴³ If it is said that this is unjust, then the Most Holy Father must make some excuse, that he may not be reproved for doing such open violence to the law, and says that in his mind and heart he had reserved that benefice to himself and his own plenary disposal, although he had never before in his whole life either thought or heard of it. Thus he has now found a little “gloss” by which he can, in his own person, lie and deceive, and make a fool and an ape of anybody – All this he does brazenly and openly, and yet he wishes to be the head of Christendom, though with his open lies he lets the Evil Spirit rule him. This arbitrary will and lying “reservation” of the pope creates in Rome a state of affairs which is unspeakable. There is buying, selling, bartering, trading, trafficking, lying, deceiving, robbing, stealing, luxury, harlotry, knavery, and every sort of contempt of God, and even the rule of Antichrist could not be more scandalous. Venice, Antwerp, Cairo⁴⁴ are nothing compared to this fair which is held at Rome and the business which is done there, except that in those other places they still observe and reason.

At Rome everything goes as the devil wills, and out of this ocean like virtue flows into all the world. Is it a wonder that such people fear a reformation and a free council, and prefer to set all kings and princes at enmity rather than have them unite and bring about a council? Who could bear to have such knavery exposed if it were his own? Finally, for all this noble commerce the pope has built a warehouse, namely, the house of the datarius,⁴⁵ in Rome. Thither all must come who deal after this fashion in benefices and livings. From him they must buy their “glosses”⁴⁶ and get the power to practice such arch-knavery. In former times Rome was generous, and then justice had either to be bought or else suppressed with money, but now she has become exorbitant, and no one dare be a knave unless with a great sum he has first bought the right. If that is not a brothel above all the brothels one can imagine, then I do not know what brothel means. If you have money in this house, then you can come by all the things I have said; and not

⁴² The *reservatio mentalis* or *in pectore* is the natural consequence of the papal theory that the right of appointment to all Church offices of every grade belongs to the pope (see above, p. 86, note 3.) According to the theory of the canonists (LANCELOTTI, *Institutiones juris canonici*, Lib. I, Tit. XXVII) this right is exercised either *per petitionem alterius*, i.e., by confirmation of the election, appointment, etc., of others, or *propriomotu*, i.e., “on his own motion.” In ordinary cases the exercise of the appointing power was limited by rules, which though bitterly complained of (see above, pp. 86 ff. and notes), were generally understood, but the theory allowed any given case to be made an exception to the rules. Of such a case it was said that it was “reserved in the heart of the Pope,” and the appointment was then made “on his own motion.” Hutten says of this reservation in *pectore* that “it is an easy, agile and slippery thing, and bears no comparison to any other form of cheating” (ed. Bocking, IV, 215).

⁴³ For a similar instances quoted at Worms (1521), see WREDE, *op. Cit.*, II, 710.

⁴⁴ The three chief centers of foreign commerce in the XV and the early XVI Century. The annual fairs (*Jahrmarkt*), held at stated times in various cities, brought great numbers of merchants together from widely distant points, and were the times when the greater part of the wholesale business for the year was done.

⁴⁵ Built by Innocent VIII (1484-1490).

⁴⁶ See above, p. 93, note 2.

only these, but all sort of usury⁴⁷ are here made honest, for a consideration, and the possession of all property acquired by theft or robbery is legalized. Here vows are dissolved; here monks are granted liberty to leave their orders; here marriage is on sale to the clergy; here bastards can become legitimate; here all dishonor and shame can come to honor; all ill repute and stigma of evil are here knighted and ennobled here is permitted the marriage which is within the forbidden degrees or has some other defect.⁴⁸ Oh! What a taxing and a robbing rules there! It looks as though all the laws of the Church were made for one purpose only – to be nothing but so many money-snares, from which a man must extricate himself,⁴⁹ if he would be a Christian. Yea, here the devil becomes a saint, and a god to boot. What heaven and earth cannot, that this house can do! They call them compositions!⁵⁰ “Compositions” indeed! rather “confusions”! Oh, what a modest tax is the Rhine-toll,⁵¹ compared with the tribute taken by this holy house! Let no one accuse me of exaggeration! It is all so open that even at Rome they must confess the evil to be greater and more terrible than any one can say. I have not yet stirred up the hell-broth of personal vices, nor do I intend to do so.

I speak of things which are common talk, and yet I have not words to tell them all. The bishops, the priests and, above all, the doctors in the universities, who draw their salaries for this purpose, should have done their duty and with common consent have written and cried out against these things; but they have done the very opposite.⁵² There remains one last word, and I must say that too. Since boundless Avarice has not been satisfied with all these treasures, which three great kings might well think sufficient, he now begins to transfer this trade and sell it to Fugger of Augsburg,⁵³ so that the lending and trading and buying of bishoprics and benefices, and the driving of bargains in spiritual goods has now come to the right place, and spiritual and temporal goods have become one business. And now I would fain hear of a mind so lofty that it could imagine what this Roman Avarice might yet be able to do and has not already done; unless Fugger were to transfer or sell this combination of two lines of business to somebody else. I believe we have reached the limit. As for what they have stolen in all lands and still steal and extort, by means of indulgences, bulls, letters of confession,⁵⁴ “butter-letters”⁵⁵ and other *confessionalia*,⁵⁶ – all this I consider mere patch-work, and like casting a single devil more into hell.⁵⁷ Not that they bring in little, for a mighty king could well support himself on their returns,

⁴⁷ The Church law forbade the taking of interest on loans of money.

⁴⁸ During the Middle Ages all question touching marriage and divorce, including, therefore, the question of the legitimacy of children, were governed by the laws of the Church, on the theory that marriage was a sacrament.

⁴⁹ i.e., By buying dispensations.

⁵⁰ The sums paid for special dispensations were so called.

⁵¹ The toll which the “robber-barons” of the Rhine levied upon merchants passing through their domains.

⁵² Ja wend das blat umb szo findistu es – The translators have adopted the interpretation of O. CLEMEN, L’s. Werke, I, 383.

⁵³ The Fuggers of Augsburg were the greatest of the German capitalists in the XVI Century. They were international bankers, “the Rothschilds of the XVI Century” Their control of large capital enabled them to advance large sums of money to the territorial rulers, who were in a chronic state of need. In return for these favors they received monopolistic concessions by which their capital was further increased. The spiritual, as well as the temporal lords, availed themselves regularly of the services of this accommodating firm. They were the pope’s financial representatives in Germany. On their connection with the indulgence against which Luther protested, see Vol. I, p. 21; on their relations with the papacy, see SCHULTE, Die Fugger in Rom, 2 Vols., Leipzig, 1904. Vol. II-7

⁵⁴ Certificates entitling the holder to choose his own confessor and authorizing the confessor to absolve him from certain classes of “reserved” sins; referred to in the XCV Theses as *confessionalia*. Cf. Vol. I, p.22.

⁵⁵ Certificates granting their possessor permission to eat milk, eggs, butter and cheese on fast days.

⁵⁶ The word is used here in the broad sense, and means dispensations of all sorts, including those just mentioned, relating to penance.

⁵⁷ Equivalent to “carrying coals to Newcastle.”

but they are not to be compared with the streams of treasure above mentioned. I shall also say nothing at present of how this indulgence money has been applied. Another time I shall inquire about that, for Campoflore,⁵⁸ and Belvidere⁵⁹ and certain other places probably know something about it. Since, then, such devilish rule is not only open robbery and deceit, and the tyranny of the gates of hell, but also ruins Christendom in body and soul, it is our duty to use all diligence in protecting Christendom against such misery and destruction.

If we would fight the Turks, let us make a beginning here, where they are at their worst. If we justly hang thieves and behead robbers, why should we let Roman Avarice go free? For he is the greatest thief and robber that has come or can come into the world, and all in the holy Name of Christ and of St. Peter! Who can longer endure it or keep silence? Almost everything he owns has been gotten by theft and robbery; that is the truth, and all history shows it. The pope never got by purchase such great properties that from his office⁶⁰ alone he can raise about a million ducats, not to mention the mines of treasure named above and the income of his lands. Nor did it come to him by inheritance from Christ or from St. Peter; no one ever loaned it or gave it to him; it has not become his by virtue of immemorial use and enjoyment. Tell me, then, whence he can have it? Learn from this what they have in mind when they send out legates to collect money for use against the Turks.

⁵⁸ The Campo di Fiore, a Roman market-place, restored and adorned at great expense by Eugenius IV (1431-1447), and his successors.

⁵⁹ A part of the Vatican palace notorious as the banqueting-hall of Alexander VI (1492-1503), turned by Julius II (1503-1513) into a museum for the housing of his wonderful and expensive collection of ancient works of art. Luther is hinting that the indulgence money has been spent on these objects rather than on the maintenance of the Church. Cf. CLEMEN, I, 384, note 15.

⁶⁰ i.e., The offices and positions in Rome which were for sale. See BENRATH, p. 88, note 18; p. 95, note 36.

Twenty-Seven Articles

Respecting the Reformation of the Christian Estate

Part I

Now though I am too lowly to submit articles that could serve for the reformation of these fearful evils, I will yet sing out my fool's song, and will show, as well as my wit will allow, what might and should be done by the temporal authorities or by a general council.

1. The Temporal Estate should forbid paying the annates to Rome

Princes, nobles, and cities should promptly forbid their subjects to pay the annates to Rome and should even abolish them altogether. For the Pope has broken the compact, and turned the annates into robbery for the harm and shame of the German nation; he gives them to his friends; he sells them for large sums of money and founds benefices on them. Therefore he has forfeited his right to them, and deserves punishment. In this way the temporal power should protect the innocent and prevent wrong-doing, as we are taught by St. Paul (Rom. 13.) and by St. Peter (1Peter 2.) and even by the canon law (16. q. 7. *de Filiis*). That is why we say to the Pope and his followers, *Tu ora!* "You shall pray"; to the Emperor and his followers, *Tu protege!* "You shall protect"; to the commons, *Tu labora!* "You shall work." Not that each man should not pray, protect, and work; for if a man fulfils his duty, that is prayer, protection, and work; but every man must have his proper task.

2. The Pope takes unlawful possession of all German foundations

Since by means of those Romish tricks, commendams, coadjutors, reservations, expectations, pope's months, incorporations, unions, Palls, rules of chancellery, and other such knaveries, the Pope takes unlawful possession of all German foundations, to give and sell them to strangers at Rome, that profit Germany in no way, so that the incumbents are robbed of their rights, and the bishops are made mere ciphers and anointed idols; and thus, besides natural justice and reason, the Pope's own canon law is violated; and things have come to such a pass that prebends and benefices are sold at Rome to vulgar, ignorant asses and knaves, out of sheer greed, while pious learned men have no profit by their merit and skill, whereby the unfortunate German people must lack good, learned prelates and suffer ruin – on account of these evils the Christian nobility should rise up against the Pope as a common enemy and destroyer of Christianity, for the sake of the salvation of the poor souls that such tyranny must ruin. They should ordain, order, and decree that henceforth no benefice shall be drawn away to Rome, and that no benefice shall be claimed there in any fashion whatsoever; and after having once got these benefices out of the hands of Romish tyranny, they must be kept from them, and their lawful incumbents must be reinstated in them to administer them as best they may within the German nation. And if a courtling came from Rome, he should receive the strict command to withdraw, or to leap into the Rhine, or whatever river is nearest, and to administer a cold bath to the Interdict, seal and letters and all. Thus those at Rome would learn that we Germans are not to remain drunken fools forever, but that we, too, are become Christians, and that as such we will no longer suffer this shameful mockery of Christ's holy name, that serves as a cloak for such knavery and destruction of souls, and that we shall respect God and the glory of God more than the power of men.

3. No episcopal cloak or confirmation shall be obtained from Rome.

It should be decreed by an imperial law that no episcopal cloak and no confirmation of any appointment shall for the future be obtained from Rome. The order of the most holy and renowned Nicene Council must again be restored, namely that a bishop must be confirmed by the two nearest bishops or by the archbishop. If the Pope cancels the decrees of these and all other councils, what is the good of councils at all? Who has given him the right thus to despise councils and to cancel them? If this is allowed, we had better abolish all bishops, archbishops and primates, and make simple rectors of all of them, so that they would have the Pope alone over them as is indeed the case now; he deprives bishops, archbishops, and primates of all the authority of their office, taking everything to himself, and leaving them only the name and the empty title; more than this, by his exemption he has withdrawn convents, abbots, and prelates from the ordinary authority of the bishops, so that there remains no order in Christendom. The necessary result of this must be, and has been, laxity in punishing and such a liberty to do evil in all the world that I very much fear one might call the Pope “the man of sin” (2Thess. 2.3). Who but the Pope is to blame for this absence of all order, of all punishment, of all government, of all discipline, in Christendom? By his own arbitrary power he ties the hands of all his prelates, and takes from them their rods, while all their subjects have their hands unloosed, and obtain licence by gift or purchase.

But, that he have no cause for complaint, as being deprived of his authority, it should be decreed that in cases where the primates and archbishops are unable to settle the matter, or where there is a dispute among them, the matters shall then be submitted to the Pope, but not every little matter, as was done formerly, and was ordered by the most renowned Nicene Council. His Holiness must not be troubled with small matters, that can be settled without his help; so that he may have leisure to devote himself to his prayers and study and to his care of all Christendom, as he professes to do, as indeed the Apostles did, saying, “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.... But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6.2, 4). But now we see at Rome nothing but contempt of the Gospel and of prayer, and the service of tables, that is the service of the goods of this world; and the government of the Pope agrees with the government of the Apostles as well as Lucifer with Christ, hell with heaven, night with day; and yet he calls himself Christ’s vicar and the successor of the Apostles.

4. No temporal matter shall be submitted to Rome

Let it be decreed that no temporal matter shall be submitted to Rome, but all shall be left to the jurisdiction of the temporal authorities. This is part of their own canon law, though they do not obey it. For this should be the Pope’s office: that he, the most learned in the Scriptures and the most holy, not in name only, but in fact, should rule in matters concerning the faith and the holy life of Christians; he should make primates and bishops attend to this, and should work and take thought with them to this end, as St. Paul teaches (1Cor. 6.), severely upbraiding those that occupy themselves with the things of this world. For all countries suffer unbearable damage by this practice of settling such matters at Rome, since it involves great expense; and besides this, the judges at Rome, not knowing the manners, laws, and customs of other countries, frequently pervert the matter according to their own laws and their own opinions, thus causing injustice to all parties. Besides this, we should prohibit in all foundations the grievous extortion of the ecclesiastical judges; they should only be allowed to consider matters concerning faith and good morals; but matters concerning money, property, life, and honour should be left to temporal judges. Therefore, the temporal authorities should not permit excommunication or expulsion except in matters of faith and righteous living. It is only reasonable that spiritual authorities should have

power in spiritual matters; spiritual matters, however, are not money or matters relating to the body, but faith and good works.

Still we might allow matters respecting benefices or prebends to be treated before bishops, archbishops, and primates. Therefore when it is necessary to decide quarrels and strifes let the Primate of Germany hold a general consistory, with assessors and chancellors, who would have the control over the *signaturas gratiae* and *justitiae* ¹ and to whom matters arising in Germany might be submitted by appeal. The officers of such court should be paid out of the annates, or in some other way, and should not have to draw their salaries, as at Rome, from chance presents and offerings, whereby they grow accustomed to sell justice and injustice, as they must needs do at Rome, where the Pope gives them no salary, but allows them to fatten themselves on presents; for at Rome no one heeds what is right or what is wrong, but only what is money and what is not money. They might be paid out of the annates, or by some other means devised by men of higher understanding and of more experience in these things than I have. I am content with making these suggestions and giving some materials for consideration to those who may be able and willing to help the German nation to become a free people of Christians, after this wretched, heathen, unchristian misrule of the Pope.

5. No reservations or benefices shall be validated or appropriated by Rome

Henceforth no reservations shall be valid, and no benefices shall be appropriated by Rome, whether the incumbent die there, or there be a dispute, or the incumbent be a servant of the Pope or of a cardinal; and all courtiers shall be strictly prohibited and prevented from causing a dispute about any benefice, so as to cite the pious priests, to trouble them, and to drive them to pay compensation. And if in consequence of this there comes an interdict from Rome, let it be despised, just as if a thief were to excommunicate any man because he would not allow him to steal in peace. No, they should be punished most severely for making such a blasphemous use of excommunication and of the name of God, to support their robberies, and for wishing by their false threats to drive us to suffer and approve this blasphemy of God's name and this abuse of Christian authority, and thus to become sharers before God in their wrong-doing, whereas it is our duty before God to punish it, as St. Paul (Rom. 1.) upbraids the Romans for not only doing wrong, but allowing wrong to be done. But above all that lying mental reservation (*pectoralis reservatio*) is unbearable, by which Christendom is so openly mocked and insulted, in that its head notoriously deals with lies, and impudently cheats and fools every man for the sake of accursed wealth.

6. Reserved cases should be abolished

The cases reserved ² (*casus reservati*) should be abolished, by which not only are the people cheated out of much money, but besides many poor consciences are confused and led into error by the ruthless tyrants, to the intolerable harm of their faith in God, especially those foolish and childish cases that are made important by the bull *In Coena Domini*, ³ and which do not deserve the name of daily sins, not to mention those great cases for which the Pope gives no absolution, such as preventing a pilgrim from going to Rome, furnishing the Turks with arms, or forging the Pope's letters. They only fool us with these gross, mad, and clumsy matters: Sodom and Gomorrah, and all sins that are committed and that can be

¹ At the time when the above was written the function of the *signatura gratiae* was to superintend the conferring of grants, concessions, favours, etc., whilst the *signatura justitiae* embraced the general administration of ecclesiastical matters.

² "Reserved cases" refer to those great sins for which the Pope or the bishops only could give absolution.

³ The celebrated papal bull known under the name of *In Coena Domini*, containing anathemas and excommunications against all those who dissented in any way from the Roman Catholic creed, used until the year 1770 to be read publicly at Rome on Maundy Thursday.

committed against God's commandments, are not reserved cases; but what God never commanded and they themselves have invented – these must be made reserved cases, solely in order that none may be prevented from bringing money to Rome, that they may live in their lust without fear of the Turk, and may keep the world in their bondage by their wicked useless bulls and briefs.

Now all priests ought to know, or rather it should be a public ordinance, that no secret sin constitutes a reserved case, if there be no public accusation; and that every priest has power to absolve from all sin, whatever its name, if it be secret, and that no abbot, bishop, or pope has power to reserve any such case; and, lastly, that if they do this, it is null and void, and they should, moreover, be punished as interfering without authority in God's judgment and confusing and troubling without cause our poor witless consciences. But in respect to any great open sin, directly contrary to God's commandments, there is some reason for a "reserved case"; but there should not be too many, nor should they be reserved arbitrarily without due cause. For God has not ordained tyrants, but shepherds, in His Church, as St. Peter says (1Pet 5.2).

7. The Roman See must abolish the papal offices and reduce their court

The Roman See must abolish the papal offices, and diminish that crowd of crawling vermin at Rome, so that the Pope's servants may be supported out of the Pope's own pocket, and that his court may cease to surpass all royal courts in its pomp and extravagance; seeing that all this pomp has not only been of no service to the Christian faith, but has also kept them from study and prayer, so that they themselves know hardly anything concerning matters of faith, as they proved clumsily enough at the last Roman Council,⁴ where, among many childishly trifling matters, they decided "that the soul is immortal," and that a priest is bound to pray once every month on pain of losing his benefice.⁵ How are men to rule Christendom and to decide matters of faith who, callous and blinded by their greed, wealth, and worldly pomp, have only just decided that the soul is immortal? It is no slight shame to all Christendom that they should deal thus scandalously with the faith at Rome. If they had less wealth and lived in less pomp, they might be better able to study and pray that they might become able and worthy to treat matters of belief, as they were once, when they were content to be bishops, and not kings of kings.

8. The terrible oaths must be abolished

The terrible oaths must be abolished which bishops are forced, without any right, to swear to the Pope, by which they are bound like servants, and which are arbitrarily and foolishly decreed in the absurd and shallow chapter *Significasti*.⁶ Is it not enough that they oppress us in goods, body, and soul by all their mad laws, by which they have weakened faith and destroyed Christianity; but must they now take possession of the very persons of bishops, with their offices and functions, and also claim the investiture⁷ which used formerly to be the right of the German emperors, and is still the right of the King in France and other kingdoms? This matter caused many wars and disputes with the emperors until the popes impudently took the power by force, since which time they have retained it, just as if it were only right for the Germans, above all Christians on earth, to be the fools of the Pope and the Holy See, and to do and

⁴ The council alluded to above was held at Rome from 1512 to 1517.

⁵ Luther's objection is not, of course, to the recognition of the immortality of the soul; what he objects to is (1) that it was thought necessary for a council to decree that the soul is immortal, and (2) that this question was put on a level with trivial matters of discipline.

⁶ The above is the title of a chapter in the *Corpus Juris Canonici*. [[Body of Canon Law](#)]

⁷ The right of investiture was the subject of the dispute between Gregory VII. and Henry IV., which led to the Emperor's submission at Canossa.

suffer what no one beside would suffer or do. Seeing then that this is mere arbitrary power, robbery, and a hindrance to the exercise of the bishop's ordinary power, and to the injury of poor souls, therefore it is the duty of the Emperor and his nobles to prevent and punish this tyranny.

9. The Pope should have no power over the Emperor

The Pope should have no power over the Emperor, except to anoint and crown him at the altar, as a bishop crowns a king; nor should that devilish pomp be allowed that the Emperor should kiss the Pope's feet or sit at his feet, or, as it is said, hold his stirrup or the reins of his mule, when he mounts to ride; much less should he pay homage to the Pope, or swear allegiance, as is impudently demanded by the popes, as if they had a right to it. The chapter *Solite*,⁸ in which the papal authority is exalted above the imperial, is not worth a farthing, and so of all those that depend on it or fear it; for it does nothing but pervert God's holy words from their true meaning, according to their own imaginations, as I have proved in a Latin treatise.

All these excessive, over-presumptuous, and most wicked claims of the Pope are the invention of the devil, with the object of bringing in antichrist in due course and of raising the Pope above God, as indeed many have done and are now doing. It is not meet that the Pope should exalt himself above temporal authority, except in spiritual matters, such as preaching and absolution; in other matters he should be subject to it, according to the teaching of St. Paul (Rom. 13.) and St. Peter (1Pet 3.), as I have said above. He is not the vicar of Christ in heaven, but only of Christ upon earth. For Christ in heaven, in the form of a ruler, requires no vicar, but there sits, sees, does, knows, and commands all things. But He requires him "in the form of a servant" to represent Him as He walked upon earth, working, preaching, suffering, and dying. But they reverse this: they take from Christ His power as a heavenly Ruler, and give it to the Pope, and allow "the form of a servant" to be entirely forgotten (Phil. 2.7). He should properly be called the counter-Christ, whom the Scriptures call antichrist; for his whole existence, work, and proceedings are directed against Christ, to ruin and destroy the existence and will of Christ.

It is also absurd and puerile for the Pope to boast for such blind, foolish reasons, in his decretal *Pastoralis*, that he is the rightful heir to the empire, if the throne be vacant. Who gave it to him? Did Christ do so when He said, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, but you shall not do so" (Luke 22.25-26)? Did St. Peter bequeath it to him? It disgusts me that we have to read and teach such impudent, clumsy, foolish lies in the canon law, and, moreover, to take them for Christian doctrine, while in reality they are mere devilish lies. Of this kind also is the unheard-of lie touching the "donation of Constantine."⁹ It must have been a plague sent by God that induced so many wise people to accept such lies, though they are so gross and clumsy that one would think a drunken boor could lie more skilfully. How could preaching, prayer, study, and the care of the poor consist with the government of the empire? These are the true offices of the Pope, which Christ imposed with such insistence that He forbade them to take either coat or scrip (Matt. 10.10), for he that has to govern a single house can hardly perform these duties. Yet the Pope wishes to rule an empire and to remain a pope. This is the invention of the knaves that would fain become lords of the world in the Pope's name, and set up again the old Roman empire, as it was formerly, by means of the Pope and name of Christ, in its former condition.

⁸ The chapter *Solite* is also contained in the *Corpus Juris Canonici*.

⁹ In order to legalize the secular power of the Pope, the fiction was invented during the latter part of the eighth century, that Constantine the Great had made over to the popes the dominion over Rome and over the whole of Italy.

10. The Pope must withdraw his authority over Naples and Sicily

The Pope must withdraw his hand from the dish, and on no pretence assume royal authority over Naples and Sicily. He has no more right to them than I, and yet claims to be the lord – their liege lord. They have been taken by force and robbery, like almost all his other possessions. Therefore the Emperor should grant him no such fief, nor any longer allow him those he has, but direct him instead to his Bibles and Prayer-books, so that he may leave the government of countries and peoples to the temporal power, especially of those that no one has given him. Let him rather preach and pray! The same should be done with Bologna, Imola, Vicenza, Ravenna, and whatever the Pope has taken by force and holds without right in the Ancontine territory, in the Romagna, and other parts of Italy, interfering in their affairs against all the commandments of Christ and St. Paul. For St. Paul says “that he that would be one of the soldiers of heaven must not entangle himself in the affairs of this life” (2Tim 2.4). Now the Pope should be the head and the leader of the soldiers of heaven, and yet he engages more in worldly matters than any king or emperor. He should be relieved of his worldly cares and allowed to attend to his duties as a soldier of heaven. Christ also, whose vicar he claims to be, would have nothing to do with the things of this world, and even asked one that desired of Him a judgment concerning his brother, “Who made Me a judge over you?” (St. Luke 12.14). But the Pope interferes in these matters unasked, and concerns himself with all matters, as though he were a god, until he himself has forgotten what this Christ is whose vicar he professes to be.

11. The custom of kissing the Pope’s feet must cease.

The custom of kissing the Pope’s feet must cease. It is an unchristian, or rather an anti-Christian, example that a poor sinful man should suffer his feet to be kissed by one who is a hundred times better than he. If it is done in honour of his power, why does he not do it to others in honour of their holiness? Compare them together: Christ and the Pope. Christ washed His disciples’ feet and dried them, and the disciples never washed His. The Pope, pretending to be higher than Christ, inverts this, and considers it a great favour to let us kiss his feet; whereas, if any one wished to do so, he ought to do his utmost to prevent him, as St. Paul and Barnabas would not suffer themselves to be worshipped as gods by the men at Lystra, saying, “We also are men of like passions with you” (Acts 14.14 seq.). But our flatterers have brought things to such a pitch that they have set up an idol for us, until no one regards God with such fear or honours Him with such marks of reverence as he does the Pope. This they can suffer, but not that the Pope’s glory should be diminished a single hair’s-breadth. Now if they were Christians and preferred God’s honour to their own, the Pope would never be pleased to have God’s honour despised and his own exalted, nor would he allow any to honour him until he found that God’s honour was again exalted above his own.

It is of a piece with this revolting pride that the Pope is not satisfied with riding on horseback or in a carriage, but though he be hale and strong, is carried by men, like an idol in unheard-of pomp. My friend, how does this Lucifer-like pride agree with the example of Christ, who went on foot, as did also all His Apostles? Where has there been a king who has ridden in such worldly pomp as he does, who professes to be the head of all whose duty it is to despise and flee from all worldly pomp – I mean, of all Christians? Not that this need concern us for his own sake, but that we have good reason to fear God’s wrath, if we flatter such pride and do not show our discontent. It is enough that the Pope should be so mad and foolish; but it is too much that we should sanction and approve it.

For what Christian heart can be pleased at seeing the Pope when he communicates, sit still like a gracious lord and have the Sacrament handed to him on a golden reed by a cardinal bending on his knees before him? Just as if the Holy Sacrament were not worthy that a pope, a poor miserable sinner, should stand to

do honour to his God, although all other Christians, who are much more holy than the Most Holy Father, receive it with all reverence! Could we be surprised if God visited us all with a plague for that we suffer such dishonour to be done to God by our prelates, and approve it, becoming partners of the Pope's damnable pride by our silence or flattery? It is the same when he carries the Sacrament in procession. He must be carried, but the Sacrament stands before him like a cup of wine on a table. In short, at Rome Christ is nothing, the Pope is everything; yet they urge us and threaten us, to make us suffer and approve and honour this anti-Christian scandal, contrary to God and all Christian doctrine. Now may God so help a free council that it may teach the Pope that he too is a man, not above God, as he makes himself out to be.

12. Pilgrimages to Rome must be abolished

Pilgrimages to Rome must be abolished, or at least no one must be allowed to go from his own wish or his own piety, unless his priest, his town magistrate, or his lord has found that there is sufficient reason for his pilgrimage. This I say, not because pilgrimages are bad in themselves, but because at the present time they lead to mischief; for at Rome a pilgrim sees no good examples, but only offence. They themselves have made a proverb, "The nearer to Rome, the farther from Christ," and accordingly men bring home contempt of God and of God's commandments. It is said, "The first time one goes to Rome, he goes to seek a rogue; the second time he finds him; the third time he brings him home with him." But now they have become so skilful that they can do their three journeys in one, and they have, in fact, brought home from Rome this saying: "It were better never to have seen or heard of Rome."

And even if this were not so, there is something of more importance to be considered; namely, that simple men are thus led into a false delusion and a wrong understanding of God's commandments. For they think that these pilgrimages are precious and good works; but this is not true. It is but a little good work, often a bad, misleading work, for God has not commanded it. But He has commanded that each man should care for his wife and children and whatever concerns the married state, and should, besides, serve and help his neighbour. Now it often happens that one goes on a pilgrimage to Rome, spends fifty or one hundred guilders more or less, which no one has commanded him, while his wife and children, or those dearest to him, are left at home in want and misery; and yet he thinks, poor foolish man, to atone for this disobedience and contempt of God's commandments by his self-willed pilgrimage, while he is in truth misled by idle curiosity or the wiles of the devil. This the popes have encouraged with their false and foolish invention of Golden Years,¹⁰ by which they have incited the people, have torn them away from God's commandments and turned them to their own delusive proceedings, and set up the very thing that they ought to have forbidden. But it brought them money and strengthened their false authority, and therefore it was allowed to continue, though against God's will and the salvation of souls.

That this false, misleading belief on the part of simple Christians may be destroyed, and a true opinion of good works may again be introduced, all pilgrimages should be done away with. For there is no good in them, no commandment, but countless causes of sin and of contempt of God's commandments. These pilgrimages are the reason for there being so many beggars, who commit numberless villainies, learn to beg without need and get accustomed to it. Hence arises a vagabond life, besides other miseries which I cannot dwell on now. If any one wishes to go on a pilgrimage or to make a vow for a pilgrimage, he should first inform his priest or the temporal authorities of the reason, and if it should turn out that he wishes to do it for the sake of good works, let this vow and work be just trampled upon by the priest or the temporal authority as an infernal delusion, and let them tell him to spend his money and the labour a

¹⁰ The Jubilees, during which plenary indulgences were granted to those who visited the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul at Rome, were originally celebrated every hundred years and subsequently every twenty-five years. Those who were unable to go to Rome in person could obtain the plenary indulgences by paying the expenses of the journey to Rome into the papal treasury.

pilgrimage would cost on God's commandments and on a thousandfold better work, namely, on his family and his poor neighbours. But if he does it out of curiosity, to see cities and countries, he may be allowed to do so. If he have vowed it in sickness, let such vows be prohibited, and let God's commandments be insisted upon in contrast to them; so that a man may be content with what he vowed in baptism, namely, to keep God's commandments. Yet for this once he may be suffered, for a quiet conscience' sake, to keep his silly vow. No one is content to walk on the broad high-road of God's commandments; everyone makes for himself new roads and new vows, as if he had kept all God's commandments.

13. Let no more mendicant monasteries be built

Now we come to the great crowd that promises much and performs little. Be not angry, my good sirs; I mean well. I have to tell you this bitter and sweet truth: Let no more mendicant monasteries be built! God help us! There are too many as it is. Would to God they were all abolished, or at least made over to two or three orders! It has never done good, it will never do good, to go wandering about over the country. Therefore my advice is that ten, or as many as may be required, be put together and made into one, which one, sufficiently provided for, need not beg. Oh! it is of much more importance to consider what is necessary for the salvation of the common people, than what St. Francis, or St. Dominic, or St. Augustine,¹¹ or any other man, laid down, especially since things have not turned out as they expected. They should also be relieved from preaching and confession, unless specially required to do so by bishops, priests, the congregation, or other authority. For their preaching and confession has led to nothing but mere hatred and envy between priests and monks, to the great offence and hindrance of the people, so that it well deserves to be put a stop to, since its place may very well be dispensed with. It does not look at all improbable that the Holy Roman See had its own reasons for encouraging all this crowd of monks: the Pope perhaps feared that priests and bishops, growing weary of his tyranny, might become too strong for him, and begin a reformation unendurable to his Holiness.

Besides this, one should also do away with the sections and the divisions in the same order which, caused for little reason and kept up for less, oppose each other with unspeakable hatred and malice, the result being that the Christian faith, which is very well able to stand without their divisions, is lost on both sides, and that a true Christian life is sought and judged only by outward rules, works, and practices, from which arise only hypocrisy and the destruction of souls, as everyone can see for himself. Moreover, the Pope should be forbidden to institute or to confirm the institution of such new orders; no, he should be commanded to abolish several and to lessen their number. For the faith of Christ, which alone is the important matter, and can stand without any particular order, incurs no little danger lest men should be led away by these diverse works and manners rather to live for such works and practices than to care for faith; and unless there are wise prelates in the monasteries, who preach and urge faith rather than the rule of the order, it is inevitable that the order should be injurious and misleading to simple souls, who have regard to works alone.

Now, in our own time all the prelates are dead that had faith and founded orders, just as it was in old days with the children of Israel: when their fathers were dead, that had seen God's works and miracles, their children, out of ignorance of God's work and of faith, soon began to set up idolatry and their own human works. In the same way, alas! these orders, not understanding God's works and faith, grievously labour and torment themselves by their own laws and practices, and yet never arrive at a true understanding of a spiritual and good life, as was foretold by the Apostle, saying of them, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, ...ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge" of what a true

¹¹ The above-mentioned saints were the patrons of the well-known mendicant orders: Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustines.

spiritual life is (2Tim. 3.2-7). Better to have no convents which are governed by a spiritual prelate, having no understanding of Christian faith to govern them; for such a prelate cannot but rule with injury and harm, and the greater the apparent holiness of his life in external works, the greater the harm.

It would be, I think, necessary, especially in these perilous times, that foundations and convents should again be organised as they were in the time of the Apostles and a long time after, namely when they were all free for every man to remain there as long as he wished. For what were they but Christian schools, in which the Scriptures and Christian life were taught, and where folk were trained to govern and to preach? As we read that St. Agnes went to school, and as we see even now in some nunneries, as at Quedlinburg and other places. Truly all foundations and convents ought to be free in this way: that they may serve God of a free will, and not as slaves. But now they have been bound round with vows and turned into eternal prisons, so that these vows are regarded even more than the vows of baptism. But what fruit has come of this we daily see, hear, read, and learn more and more.

I dare say that this my counsel will be thought very foolish, but I care not for this. I advise what I think best, reject it who will. I know how these vows are kept, especially that of chastity, which is so general in all these convents.¹² And yet was not ordered by Christ, and it is given to comparatively few to be able to keep it, as He says, and St. Paul also (Col. 2.20). I wish all to be helped, and that Christian souls should not be held in bondage, through customs and laws invented by men.

Part II

14. Every town should have a minister or bishop, which may marry

We see also how the priesthood is fallen, and how many a poor priest is encumbered with a woman and children and burdened in his conscience, and no one does anything to help him, though he might very well be helped. Popes and bishops may let that be lost that is being lost, and that be destroyed which is being destroyed, I will save my conscience and open my mouth freely, let it vex popes and bishops or whoever it may be; therefore I say, According to the ordinances of Christ and His Apostles, every town should have a minister or bishop, as St. Paul plainly says (Titus 1.), and this minister should not be forced to live without a lawful wife, but should be allowed to have one, as St. Paul writes, saying that “a bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife,... having his children in subjection with all gravity” (1Tim. 3.2,4). For with St. Paul a bishop and a presbyter are the same thing, as St. Jerome also confirms. But as for the bishops that we now have, of these the Scriptures know nothing; they were instituted by common Christian ordinance, so that one might rule over many ministers.

Therefore we learn from the Apostle clearly, that every town should elect a pious learned citizen from the congregation and charge him with the office of minister; the congregation should support him, and he should be left at liberty to marry or not. He should have as assistants several priests and deacons, married or not, as they please, who should help him to govern the people and the congregation with sermons and the ministration of the sacraments, as is still the case in the Greek Church. Then afterwards, when there were so many persecutions and contentions against heretics, there were many holy fathers who voluntarily abstained from the marriage state, that they might study more, and might be ready at all times for death and conflict. Now the Roman see has interfered of its own perversity, and has made a general law by which priests are forbidden to marry. This must have been at the instigation of the devil, as was

¹² Luther alludes here of course to the vow of celibacy, which was curiously styled the ‘vow of chastity’; thus indirectly condemning marriage in general.

foretold by St. Paul, saying that “there shall come teachers giving heed to seducing spirits, . . . forbidding to marry,” etc. (1Tim 4.1-2, seq.). This has been the cause of so much misery that it cannot be told, and has given occasion to the Greek Church to separate from us, and has caused infinite disunion, sin, shame, and scandal, like everything that the devil does or suggests. Now what are we to do?

My advice is to restore liberty, and to leave every man free to marry or not to marry. But if we did this we should have to introduce a very different rule and order for property; the whole canon law would be overthrown, and but few benefices would fall to Rome. I am afraid greed was a cause of this wretched, unchaste chastity, for the result of it was that every man wished to become a priest or to have his son brought up to the priesthood, not with the intention of living in chastity – for this could be done without the priestly state – but to obtain his worldly support without labour or trouble, contrary to God’s command, “In the sweat of your face shall you eat your bread” (Gen. 3.19); and they have given a colour to this commandment as though their work was praying and reading the mass. I am not here considering popes, bishops, canons, clergy, and monks who were not ordained by God; if they have laid burdens on themselves, they may bear them. I speak of the office of parish priest, which God ordained, who must rule a congregation with sermons and the ministration of the sacraments, and must live with them and lead a domestic life. These should have the liberty given them by a Christian council to marry and to avoid danger and sin. For as God has not bound them, no one may bind them, though he were an angel from heaven, let alone the Pope; and whatever is contrary to this in the canon law is mere idle talk and invention.

My advice further is, whoever henceforth is ordained priest, he should in no wise take the vow of chastity, but should protest to the bishop that he has no authority to demand this vow, and that it is a devilish tyranny to demand it. But if one is forced, or wishes to say, as some do, “so far as human frailty permits,” let every man interpret that phrase as a plain negative, that is, “I do not promise chastity”; for “human frailty does not allow men to live an unmarried life,” but only “angelic fortitude and celestial virtue.” In this way he will have a clear conscience without any vow. I offer no opinion, one way or the other, whether those who have at present no wife should marry, or remain unmarried. This must be settled by the general order of the Church and by each man’s discretion. But I will not conceal my honest counsel, nor withhold comfort from that unhappy crowd who now live in trouble with wife and children, and remain in shame, with a heavy conscience, hearing their wife called a priest’s harlot, and the children bastards. And this I say frankly, in virtue of my good right.

There is a many poor priest free from blame in all other respects, except that he has succumbed to human frailty and come to shame with a woman, both minded in their hearts to live together always in conjugal fidelity, if only they could do so with a good conscience, though as it is they live in public shame. I say, these two are surely married before God. I say, moreover, that when two are so minded, and so come to live together, they should save their conscience; let the man take the woman as his lawful wife, and live with her faithfully as her husband, without considering whether the Pope approve or not, or whether it is forbidden by canon law, or temporal. The salvation of your soul is of more importance than their tyrannous, arbitrary, wicked laws, which are not necessary for salvation, nor ordained by God. You should do as the children of Israel did who stole from the Egyptians the wages they had earned, or as a servant steals his well-earned wages from a harsh master; in the same way you also steal your wife and child from the Pope.

Let him who has faith enough to dare this only follow me courageously: I will not mislead him. I may not have the Pope’s authority, yet I have the authority of a Christian to help my neighbour and to warn him against his sins and dangers. And here there is good reason for doing so.

- (a) It is not every priest that can do without a woman, not only on account of human frailty, but still more for his household. If therefore he takes a woman, and the Pope allows this, but will not let them

marry, what is this but expecting a man and a woman to live together and not to fall? Just as if one were to set fire to straw, and command it should neither smoke nor burn.

(b) The Pope having no authority for such a command, any more than to forbid a man to eat and drink, or to digest, or to grow fat, no one is bound to obey it, and the Pope is answerable for every sin against it, for all the souls that it has brought to destruction, and for all the consciences that have been troubled and tormented by it. He has long deserved to be driven out of the world, so many poor souls has he strangled with this devil's rope, though I hope that God has shown many more mercy at their death than the Pope did in their life. No good has ever come and can ever come from the papacy and its laws.

(c) Even though the Pope's laws forbid it, still, after the married state has been entered, the Pope's laws are superseded, and are valid no longer, for God has commanded that no man shall put asunder husband and wife, and this commandment is far above the Pope's laws, and God's command must not be cancelled or neglected for the papal commands. It is true that mad lawyers have helped the Pope to invent impediments, or hindrances to marriage, and thus troubled, divided, and perverted the married state, destroying the commandments of God. What need I say further? In the whole body of the Pope's canon law, there are not two lines that can instruct a pious Christian, and so many false and dangerous ones that it were better to burn it.

But if you object that this would give offence, and that one must first obtain the Pope's dispensation, I answer that if there is any offence in it, it is the fault of the see of Rome, which has made unjust and unholy laws. It is no offence to God and the Scriptures. Even where the Pope has power to grant dispensation for money by his covetous tyrannical laws, every Christian has power to grant dispensation in the same matter for the sake of Christ and the salvation of souls. For Christ has freed us from all human laws, especially when they are opposed to God and the salvation of souls, as St. Paul teaches (Gal. 5.1 and 1Cor. 8.9-10).

15. Allow believers to confess their secret sins to whomever they will

I must not forget the poor convents. The evil spirit, who has troubled all estates of life by human laws, and made them unendurable, has taken possession of some abbots, abbesses, and prelates, and led them so to rule their brothers and sisters that they do but go soon to hell, and live a wretched life even upon earth, as is the case with all the devil's martyrs. For they have reserved in confession all, or at least some, deadly sins, which are secret, and from these no brother may on pain of excommunication and on his obedience absolve another. Now we do not always find angels everywhere, but men of flesh and blood, who would rather incur all excommunication and menace than confess their secret sins to a prelate or the confessor appointed for them; consequently they receive the Sacrament with these sins on their conscience, by which they become irregular¹³ and suffer much misery. Oh blind shepherds! Oh foolish prelates! Oh ravenous wolves! Now I say that in cases where a sin is public and notorious it is only right that the prelate alone should punish it, and such sins, and no others, he may reserve and except for himself; over private sins he has no authority, even though they may be the worst that can be committed or imagined. And if the prelate excepts these, he becomes a tyrant and interferes with God's judgment.

Accordingly I advise these children, brothers and sisters: If your superiors will not allow you to confess your secret sins to whomsoever you will, then take them yourself, and confess them to your brother or sister, to whomsoever you will; be absolved and comforted, and then go or do what your wish or duty

¹³ Luther uses the expression *irregulares*, which was applied to those monks who were guilty of heresy, apostacy, transgression of the vow of chastity, etc.

commands; only believe firmly that you have been absolved, and nothing more is necessary. And let not their threats of excommunication, or irregularity, or what not, trouble or disturb you; these only apply to public or notorious sins, if they are not confessed: you are not touched by them. How can you take upon yourself, you blind prelate, to restrain private sins by your threats? Give up what you can not keep publicly; let God's judgment and mercy also have its place with your inferiors. He has not given them into your hands so completely as to have let them go out of His own; no, you have received the smaller portion. Consider your statutes as nothing more than your statutes, and do not make them equal to God's judgment in heaven.

16. Consolidate the yearly masses

It were also right to abolish annual festivals, processions, and masses for the dead, or at least to diminish their number; for we evidently see that they have become no better than a mockery, exciting the anger of God and having no object but money-getting, gluttony, and carousals. How should it please God to hear the poor vigils and masses mumbled in this wretched way, neither read nor prayed? Even when they are properly read, it is not done freely for the love of God, but for the love of money and as payment of a debt. Now it is impossible that anything should please God or win anything from Him that is not done freely, out of love for Him. Therefore, as true Christians, we ought to abolish or lessen a practice that we see is abused, and that angers God instead of appeasing Him. I should prefer, and it would be more agreeable to God's will, and far better for a foundation, church, or convent, to pull all the yearly masses and vigils together into one mass, so that they would every year celebrate, on one day, a true vigil and mass with hearty sincerity, devotion, and faith for all their benefactors. This would be better than their thousand upon thousand masses said every year, each for a particular benefactor, without devotion and faith. My dear fellow-Christians, God cares not for much prayer, but for good prayer. No, He condemns long and frequent prayers, saying, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward" (Matt. 6.2, seq.). But it is the greed that cannot trust God by which such practices are set up; it is afraid it will die of starvation.

17. Abolish the Interdict and certain other canon law punishments

One should also abolish certain punishments inflicted by the canon law, especially the interdict, which is doubtless the invention of the evil one. Is it not the mark of the devil to wish to better one sin by more and worse sins? It is surely a greater sin to silence God's word, and service, than if we were to kill twenty popes at once, not to speak of a single priest or of keeping back the goods of the Church. This is one of those gentle virtues which are learnt in the spiritual law; for the canon or spiritual law is so called because it comes from a spirit, not, however, from the Holy Spirit, but from the evil spirit.

Excommunication should not be used except where the Scriptures command it, that is, against those that have not the right faith, or that live in open sin, and not in matters of temporal goods. But now the case has been inverted: each man believes and lives as he pleases, especially those that plunder and disgrace others with excommunications; and all excommunications are now only in matters of worldly goods, for which we have no one to thank but the holy canonical injustice. But of all this I have spoken previously in a sermon.

The other punishments and penalties – suspension, irregularity, aggravation, re-aggravation, deposition,¹⁴ thundering, lightning, cursing, damning, and what not – all these should be buried ten fathoms deep in the

¹⁴ Luther enumerates here the various grades of punishment inflicted on priests. The aggravation consisted of a threat of excommunication after a thrice-repeated admonition, whilst the consequence of re-aggravation was immediate excommunication.

earth, that their very name and memory may no longer live upon earth. The evil spirit, who was let loose by the spiritual law, has brought all this terrible plague and misery into the heavenly kingdom of the holy Church, and has thereby brought about nothing but the harm and destruction of souls, that we may well apply to it the words of Christ, “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither go in yourselves, neither do you allow them that are entering to go in” (Matt. 23.13).

18. Abolish all saints’ days, keeping only Sunday.

One should abolish all saints’ days, keeping only Sunday. But if it were desired to keep the festivals of Our Lady and the greater saints, they should all be held on Sundays, or only in the morning with the mass; the rest of the day being a working day. My reason is this: with our present abuses of drinking, gambling, idling, and all manner of sin, we vex God more on holy days than on others. And the matter is just reversed; we have made holy days unholy, and working days holy, and do no service; but great dishonour, to God and His saints will all our holy days. There are some foolish prelates that think they have done a good deed, if they establish a festival to St. Otilia or St. Barbara, and the like, each in his own blind fashion, whilst he would be doing a much better work to turn a saint’s day into a working day in honour of a saint.

Besides these spiritual evils, these saints’ days inflict bodily injury on the common man in two ways: he loses a day’s work, and he spends more than usual, besides weakening his body and making himself unfit for labour, as we see every day, and yet no one tries to improve it. One should not consider whether the Pope instituted these festivals, or whether we require his dispensation or permission. If anything is contrary to God’s will and harmful to men in body and soul, not only has every community, council, or government authority to prevent and abolish such wrong without the knowledge or consent of pope or bishop, but it is their duty, as they value their soul’s salvation, to prevent it, even though pope and bishop (that should be the first to do so) are unwilling to see it stopped. And first of all we should abolish church wakes, since they are nothing but taverns, fairs, and gaming places, to the greater dishonour of God and the damnation of souls. It is no good to make a talk about their having had a good origin and being good works. Did not God set aside His own law that He had given forth out of heaven when He saw it was abused, and does He not now reverse every day what He has appointed, and destroy what He has made, on account of the same perverse misuse, as it is written in Psalm 18.26, “With the perverse you will show yourself froward”?

19. Allow third and fourth degrees of consanguinity for marriage

The degrees of relationship in which marriage is forbidden must be altered, such as so-called spiritual relations.¹⁵ In the third and fourth degrees; and where the Pope at Rome can dispense in such matters for money, and make shameful bargains, every priest should have the power of granting the same dispensations freely for the salvation of souls. Would to God that all those things that have to be bought at Rome, for freedom from the golden snares of the canon law, might be given by any priest without payment, such as indulgences, letters of indulgences, letters of dispensation, mass letters, and all the other religious licences and knaveries at Rome by which the poor people are deceived and robbed! For if the Pope has the power to sell for money his golden snares, or canon nets (laws, I should say), much more has a priest the power to cancel them and to trample on them for God’s sake. But if he has no such power, then the Pope can have no authority to sell them in his shameful fair.

¹⁵ Those, namely, between sponsors at baptism and their good-children.

Besides this, fasts must be made optional, and every kind of food made free, as is commanded in the Gospels (Matt. 15.2). For whilst at Rome they laugh at fasts, they let us abroad consume oil which they would not think fit for greasing their boots, and then sell us the liberty of eating butter and other things, whereas the Apostle says that the Gospel has given us freedom in all such matters (1Cor. 10.25, seq.). But they have caught us in their canon law and have robbed us of this right, so that we have to buy it back from them; they have so terrified the consciences of the people that one cannot preach this liberty without rousing the anger of the people, who think the eating of butter to be a worse sin than lying, swearing, and unchastity. We may make of it what we will; it is but the work of man, and no good can ever come of it.

20. Destroy the country chapels and churches used in pilgrimages

The country chapels and churches must be destroyed, such as those to which the new pilgrimages have been set on foot: Wilsnack, Sternberg, Treves, the Grimmenthal, and now Ratisbon, and many others. Oh, what a reckoning there will be for those bishops that allow these inventions of the devil and make a profit out of them! They should be the first to stop it; they think that it is a godly, holy thing, and do not see that the devil does this to strengthen covetousness, to teach false beliefs, to weaken parish churches, to increase drunkenness and debauchery, to waste money and labour, and simply to lead the poor people by the nose. If they had only studied the Scriptures as much as their accused canon law, they would know well how to deal with the matter.

The miracles performed there prove nothing, for the evil one can show also wonders, as Christ has taught us (Matt. 24.24). If they took up the matter earnestly and forbade such doings, the miracles would soon cease: or if they were done by God, they would not be prevented by their commands. And if there were nothing else to prove that these are not works of God, it would be enough that people go about turbulently and irrationally like herds of cattle, which could not possibly come from God. God has not commanded it; there is no obedience, and no merit in it; and therefore it should be vigorously interfered with, and the people warned against it. For what is not commanded by God and goes beyond God's commandments is surely the devil's own work. In this way also the parish churches suffer: in that they are less venerated. In fine, these pilgrimages are signs of great want of faith in the people; for if they truly believed, they would find all things in their own churches, where they are commanded to go.

But what is the use of my speaking. Every man thinks only how he may get up such a pilgrimage in his own district, not caring whether the people believe and live rightly. The rulers are like the people: blind leaders of the blind. Where pilgrimages are a failure, they begin to glorify their saints, not to honour the saints, who are sufficiently honoured without them, but to cause a concourse, and to bring in money. Herein pope and bishops help them; it rains indulgences, and everyone can afford to buy them: but what God has commanded no one cares for; no one runs after it, no one can afford any money for it. Alas for our blindness, that we not only suffer the devil to have his way with his phantoms, but support him! I wish one would leave the good saints alone, and not lead the poor people astray. What spirit gave the Pope authority to "glorify" the saints? Who tells him whether they are holy or not holy? Are there not enough sins on earth as it is but we must tempt God, interfere in His judgment, and make money-bags of His saints? Therefore my advice is to let the saints glorify themselves. No, God alone should be glorified, and every man should keep to his own parish, where he will profit more than in all these shrines, even if they were all put together into one shrine. Here a man finds baptism, the Sacrament, preaching, and his neighbour, and these are more than all the saints in heaven, for it is by God's word and sacrament that they have all been hallowed.

Our contempt for these great matters justifies God's anger in giving us over to the devil to lead us astray, to get up pilgrimages, to found churches and chapels, to glorify the saints, and to commit other like follies, by which we are led astray from the true faith into new false beliefs, just as He did in old time with the people of Israel, whom He led away from the Temple to countless other places, all the while in God's name, and with the appearance of holiness, against which all the prophets preached, suffering martyrdom for their words. But now no one preaches against it; for if he did, bishops, popes, priests, and monks would perchance combine to martyr him. In this way Antonius of Florence and many others are made saints, so that their holiness may serve to produce glory and wealth, which served before to the honour of God and as a good example alone.

Even if this glorification of the saints had been good once, it is not good now, just as many other things were good once and are now occasion of offence and injurious, such as holidays, ecclesiastical treasures and ornaments. For it is evident that what is aimed at in the glorification of saints is not the glory of God nor the bettering of Christendom, but money and fame alone; one Church wishes to have an advantage over another, and would be sorry to see another Church enjoying the same advantages. In this way they have in these latter days abused the goods of the Church so as to gain the goods of the world; so that everything, and even God Himself, must serve their avarice. Moreover, these privileges cause nothing but dissensions and worldly pride; one Church being different from the rest, they despise or magnify one another, whereas all goods that are of God should be common to all, and should serve to produce unity. This, too, is much liked by the Pope, who would be sorry to see all Christians equal and at one with one another.

Here must be added that one should abolish, or treat as of no account, or give to all Churches alike, the licences, bulls, and whatever the Pope sells at his flaying-ground at Rome. For if he sells or gives to Wittenberg, to Halle, to Venice, and above all, to his own city of Rome, permissions, privileges, indulgences, graces, advantages, faculties, why does he not give them to all Churches alike? Is it not his duty to do all that he can for all Christians without reward, solely for God's sake, no, even to shed his blood for them? Why then, I should like to know, does he give or sell these things to one Church and not to another? Or does this accursed gold make a difference in his Holiness' eyes between Christians who all alike have baptism, Gospel, faith, Christ, God, and all things? Do they wish us to be blind, when our eyes can see, to be fools, when we have reason, that we should worship this greed knavery, and delusion? He is a shepherd, forsooth – so long as you have money, no further; and yet they are not ashamed to practise all this knavery right and left with their bulls. They care only for that accursed gold, and for nothing besides.

Therefore my advice is this: If this folly is not done away with, let all pious Christians open their eyes, and not be deceived by these Romish bulls and seals and all their specious pretences; let them stop at home in their own churches, and be satisfied with their baptism, Gospel, faith, Christ, and God (who is everywhere the same), and let the Pope continue to be a blind leader of the blind. Neither pope nor angel can give you as much as God gives you in your own parish; no, he only leads you away from God's gifts, which you have for nothing, to his own gifts, which you must buy, giving you lead for gold, skin for meat, strings for a purse, wax for honey, words for goods, the letter for the spirit, as you can see for yourselves though you will not perceive it. If you try to ride to heaven on the Pope's wax and parchment, your carriage will soon break down, and you will fall into hell, not in God's name.

Let this be a fixed rule for you: Whatever has to be bought of the Pope is neither good, nor of God. For whatever comes from God is not only given freely, but all the world is punished and condemned for not accepting it freely. So is it with the Gospel and the works of God. We have deserved to be led into these errors, because we have despised God's holy word and the grace of baptism; as St. Paul says, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2Thess. 2.11-12).

21. Abolish all begging in Christendom

It is one of the most urgent necessities to abolish all begging in Christendom. No one should go about begging among Christians. It would not be hard to do this, if we attempted it with good heart and courage: each town should support its own poor and should not allow strange beggars to come in, whatever they may call themselves, pilgrims or mendicant monks. Every town could feed its own poor; and if it were too small, the people in the neighbouring villages should be called upon to contribute. As it is, they have to support many knaves and vagabonds under the name of beggars. If they did what I propose, they would at least know who were really poor or not.

There should also be an overseer or guardian who should know all the poor, and should inform the town-council, or the priest, of their requirements; or some other similar provision might be made. There is no occupation, in my opinion, in which there is so much knavery and cheating as among beggars; which could easily be done away with. This general, unrestricted begging is, besides, injurious for the common people. I estimate that of the five or six orders of mendicant monks each one visits every place more than six or seven times in the year; then there are the common beggars, emissaries, and pilgrims; in this way I calculate every city has a blackmail levied on it about sixty times a year, not counting rates and taxes paid to the civil government and the useless robberies of the Roman see; so that it is to my mind one of the greatest of God's miracles how we manage to live and support ourselves.

Some may think that in this way the poor would not be well cared for, and that such great stone houses and convents would not be built, and not so plentifully, and I think so too. Nor is it necessary. If a man will be poor he should not be rich; if he will be rich, let him put his hand to the plough, and get wealth himself out of the earth. It is enough to provide decently for the poor, that they may not die of cold and hunger. It is not right that one should work that another may be idle, and live ill that another may live well, as is now the perverse abuse, for St. Paul says, "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (2Thess. 3.10). God has not ordained that any one should live of the goods of others, except priests and ministers alone, as St. Paul says (1Cor. 9.14), for their spiritual work's sake, as also Christ says to the Apostles, "The labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10.7).

22. Endow no more masses and abolish many that have been endowed

It is also to be feared that the many masses that have been founded in convents and foundations, instead of doing any good, arouse God's anger; wherefore it would be well to endow no more masses and to abolish many of those that have been endowed; for we see that they are only looked upon as sacrifices and good works, though in truth they are sacraments like baptism and confession, and as such profit him only that receives them. But now the custom obtains of saying masses for the living and the dead, and everything is based upon them. This is the reason why there are so many, and that they have come to be what we see.

But perhaps all this is a new and unheard-of doctrine, especially in the eyes of those that fear to lose their livelihood, if these masses were abolished. I must therefore reserve what I have to say on this subject until men have arrived at a truer understanding of the mass, its nature and use. The mass has, alas! For so many years been turned into means of gaining a livelihood, that I should advise a man to become a shepherd, a labourer, rather than a priest or monk, unless he knows what the mass is.

All this, however, does not apply to the old foundations and chapters, which were doubtless founded in order that since, according to the custom of Germany, all the children of nobles cannot be landowners and rulers, they should be provided for in these foundations, and these serve God freely, study, and become

learned themselves, and help others to acquire learning. I am speaking only of the new foundations, endowed for prayers and masses, by the example of which the old foundations have become burdened with the like prayers and masses, making them of very little, if of any, use. Through God's righteous punishment, they have at last come down to the dregs, as they deserve – that is, to the noise of singers and organs, and cold, spiritless masses, with no end but to gain and spend the money due to them. Popes, bishops, and doctors should examine and report on such things; as it is they are the guiltiest, allowing anything that brings them money; the blind ever leading the blind. This comes of covetousness and the canon law.

It must, moreover, not be allowed in future that one man should have more than one endowment or prebend. He should be content with a moderate position in life, so that others may have something besides himself; and thus we must put a stop to the excuses of those that say that they must have more than one office to enable them to live in their proper station. It is possible to estimate one's "proper station" in such a way that a whole kingdom would not suffice to maintain it. So it is that covetousness and want of faith in God go hand in hand, and often men take for the requirements of their "proper station" what is mere covetousness and want of faith.

23. Abolish fraternities, indulgences, dispensations, and special masses

As for the fraternities, together with indulgences, letters of indulgence, dispensations for Lent, and masses, and all the rest of such things, let them all be drowned and abolished; there is no good in them at all. If the Pope has the authority to grant dispensation in the matter of eating butter and hearing masses, let him allow priests to do the same; he has no right to take the power from them. I speak also of the fraternities in which indulgences, masses, and good works are distributed. My friend, in baptism you joined a fraternity of which Christ, the angels, and saints, and all Christians are members; be true to this, and satisfy it, and you will have fraternities enough. Let others make what show they wish; they are as counters compared to coins. But if there were a fraternity that subscribed money to feed the poor or to help others in any way, this would be good, and it would have its indulgence and its deserts in heaven. But now they are good for nothing but gluttony and drunkenness.

First of all we should expel from all German lands the Pope's legates, with their faculties, which they sell to us for much money, though it is all knavery – as, for instance, their taking money for making goods unlawfully acquired to be good, for freeing from oaths, vows, and bonds, thus destroying and teaching others to destroy truth and faith mutually pledged, saying the Pope has authority to do so. It is the evil spirit that bids them talk thus, and so they sell us the devil's teaching, and take money for teaching us sins and leading us to hell.

If there were nothing else to show that the Pope is antichrist, this would be enough. Do you hear this, O Pope! Not the most holy, but the most sinful? Would that God would hurl your chair headlong from heaven, and cast it down into the abyss of hell! Who gave you the power to exalt yourself above your God; to break and to loose what He has commanded; to teach Christians, more especially Germans, who are of noble nature, and are famed in all histories for uprightness and truth, to be false, unfaithful, perjured, treacherous, and wicked? God has commanded to keep faith and observe oaths even with enemies; you dare to cancel this command, laying it down in your heretical, anti-Christian decretals that you have power to do so; and through your mouth and your pen Satan lies as he never lied before, teaching you to twist and pervert the Scriptures according to your own arbitrary will. O Lord Christ, look down upon this; let your day of judgment come and destroy the devil's lair at Rome. Behold him of whom St. Paul spoke (2Thess. 2,3-4) that he should exalt himself above you and sit in your Church,

showing himself as God – the man of sin and the child of damnation. What else does the Pope’s power do but teach and strengthen sin and wickedness, leading souls to damnation in your name?

The children of Israel in old times were obliged to keep the oath that they had sworn, in ignorance and error, to the Gibeonites, their enemies; and King Zedekiah was destroyed utterly, with his people, because he broke the oath that he had sworn to the King of Babylon; and among us, a hundred years ago, the noble King Ladislaus V. of Poland and Hungary, was slain by the Turk, with so many of his people, because he allowed himself to be misled by papal legates and cardinals and broke the good and useful treaty that he had made with the Turk. The pious Emperor Sigismund had no good fortune after the Council of Constance, in which he allowed the knaves to violate the safe-conduct that he had promised to John Huss and Jerome; from this has followed all the miserable strife between Bohemia and ourselves. And in our own time, God help us! How much Christian blood has been shed on account of the oath and bond which Pope Julius made and unmade between the Emperor Maximilian and King Louis of France! How can I tell all the misery the popes have caused by such devilish insolence, claiming the power of breaking oaths between great lords, causing a shameful scandal for the sake of money? I hope the Day of Judgment is at hand; things cannot and will not become worse than the dealings of the Roman chair. The Pope treads God’s commandments under foot and exalts his own; if this is not antichrist, I do not know what is. But of this, and to more purpose, another time.

24. Take up the cause of the Bohemians (Hussites) and unite with them

It is high time to take up earnestly and truthfully the cause of the Bohemians, to unite them with ourselves and ourselves with them, so that all mutual accusations, envy, and hatred may cease. I will be the first, in my folly, to give my opinion, with all due deference to those of better understanding.

First of all, we must honestly confess the truth, without attempting self-justification, and own one thing to the Bohemians, namely that John Huss and Jerome of Prague were burnt at Constance in violation of the papal, Christian, and imperial oath and safe-conduct, and that thus God’s commandment was broken and the Bohemians excited to great anger. And though they may have deserved such great wrong and disobedience to God on our part, they were not obliged to approve it and think it right. No, even now they should run any danger of life and limb rather than own that it is right to break an imperial, papal, Christian safe-conduct and act faithlessly in opposition to it. Therefore, though the Bohemians may be to blame for their impatience, yet the Pope and his followers are most to blame for all the misery, all the error and destruction of souls, that followed this council of Constance.

It is not my intention here to judge John Huss’ belief and to defend his errors, although my understanding has not been able to find any error in him, and I would willingly believe that men who violated a safe-conduct and God’s commandment (doubtless possessed rather by the evil spirit than by the Spirit of God) were unable to judge well or to condemn with truth. No one can imagine that the Holy Ghost can break God’s commandments; no one can deny that it is breaking God’s commandments to violate faith and a safe-conduct, even though it were promised to the devil himself, much more then, in the case of a heretic; it is also notorious that a safe-conduct was promised to John Huss and the Bohemians, and that the promise was broken and Huss was burnt. I have no wish to make a saint or a martyr of John Huss (as some Bohemians do), though I own that he was treated unjustly, and that his books and his doctrines were wrongfully condemned; for God’s judgments are inscrutable and terrible, and none but Himself may reveal or explain them.

All I say is this: Granting he was a heretic, however bad he may have been, yet he was burnt unjustly and in violation of God’s commandments, and we must not force the Bohemians to approve this, if we wish

ever to be at one with them. Plain truth must unite us, not obstinacy. It is no use to say, as they said at the time, that a safe-conduct need not be kept, if promised to a heretic; that is as much as to say, one may break God's commandments in order to keep God's commandments. They were infatuated and blinded by the devil, that they could not see what they said or did. God has commanded us to observe a safe-conduct; and this we must do though the world should perish: much more then where it is only a question of a heretic being set free. We should overcome heretics with books, not with fire, as the old Fathers did. If there were any skill in overcoming heretics with fire, the executioner would be the most learned doctor in the world; and there would be no need to study, but he that could get another into his power could burn him.

Besides this, the Emperor and the princes should send to Bohemia several pious, learned bishops and doctors, but, for their life, no cardinal or legate or inquisitor, for such people are far too unlearned in all Christian matters, and do not seek the salvation of souls; but, like all the papal hypocrites, they seek only their own glory, profit, and honour; they were also the leaders in that calamitous affair at Constance. But those envoys should inquire into the faith of the Bohemians, to ascertain whether it would be possible to unite all their sects into one. Moreover, the Pope should (for their souls' sake) for a time abandon his supremacy and, in accordance with the statutes of the Nicene Council, allow the Bohemians to choose for themselves an archbishop of Prague, this choice to be confirmed by the Bishop of Olmutz in Moravia or of Gran in Hungary, or the Bishop of Gnesen in Poland, or the Bishop of Magdeburg in Germany. It is enough that it be confirmed by one or two of these bishops, as in the time of St. Cyprian. And the Pope has no authority to forbid it, if he forbids it, he acts as a wolf and a tyrant, and no one should obey him, but answer his excommunication by excommunicating him.

Yet if, for the honour of the chair of St. Peter, any one prefers to do this with the Pope's knowledge, I do not object, provided that the Bohemians do not pay a farthing for it, and that the Pope do not bind them a single hair's-breadth, or subject them to his tyranny by oath, as he does all other bishops, against God and justice. If he is not satisfied with the honour of his assent being asked, leave him alone, by all means, with his own rights, laws, and tyrannies; be content with the election, and let the blood of all the souls that are in danger be upon his head. For no man may countenance wrong, and it is enough to show respect to tyranny. If we cannot do otherwise, we may consider the popular election and consent as equal to a tyrannical confirmation; but I hope this will not be necessary. Sooner or later some Romans, or pious bishops and learned men, must perceive and avert the Pope's tyranny.

I do not advise that they be forced to abandon the Sacrament in both kinds, for it is neither unchristian nor heretical. They should be allowed to continue in their present way; but the new bishop must see that there be no dissensions about this matter, and they must learn that neither practice is actually wrong, just as there need be no disputes about the priests not wearing the same dress as the laity. In the same way, if they do not wish to submit to the canon laws of the Roman Church, we must not force them, but we must content ourselves with seeing that they live in faith and according to the Scriptures. For Christian life and Christian faith may very well exist without the Pope's unbearable laws; no, they cannot well exist until there are fewer of those laws or none. Our baptism has freed us and made us subject to God's word alone; why then should we suffer a man to make us the slaves of his words? As St. Paul says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5.1).

If I knew that the only error of the Hussites¹⁶ was that they believe that in the Sacrament of the altar there is true bread and wine, though under it the body and the blood of Christ – if, I say, this were their only error, I should not condemn them; but let the Bishop of Prague see to this. For it is not an article of faith

¹⁶ Luther uses here the word *Pikarden*, which is a corruption of *Begharden*, i. e. "Beghards," a nickname frequently applied in those days to the Hussites.

that in the Sacrament there is no bread and wine in substance and nature, which is a delusion of St. Thomas and the Pope; but it is an article of faith that in the natural bread and wine there is Christ's true flesh and blood. We should accordingly tolerate the views of both parties until they are at one; for there is not much danger whether you believe there is or there is not bread in the Sacrament. For we have to suffer many forms of belief and order that do not injure the faith; but if they believe otherwise, it would be better not to unite with them, and yet to instruct them in the truth.

All other errors and dissensions to be found in Bohemia should be tolerated until the Archbishop has been reinstated, and has succeeded in time in uniting the whole people in one harmonious doctrine. We shall never unite them by force, by driving or hurrying them. We must be patient, and use gentleness. Did not Christ have to walk with His disciples, suffering their unbelief, until they believed in His resurrection? If they had but once more a regular bishop and good government without Romish tyranny, I think matters would mend.

The temporal possessions of the Church should not be too strictly claimed; but since we are Christians and bound to help one another, we have the right to give them these things for the sake of unity, and to let them keep them, before God and the world; for Christ says, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Would to God we helped on both sides to bring about this unity, giving our hands one to the other in brotherly humility, not insisting on our authority or our rights! Love is more, and more necessary, than the papacy at Rome, which is without love, and love can exist without the papacy. I hope I have done my best for this end. If the Pope or his followers hinder this good work, they will have to give an account of their actions for having, against the love of God, sought their own advantage more than their neighbours'. The Pope should abandon his papacy, all his possessions and honours, if he could save a soul by so doing. But he would rather see the world go to ruin than give up a hair's-breadth of the power he has usurped; and yet he would be our most holy father. Herewith I am excused.

Part III

25. The universities also require a good, sound reformation.

I must say this, let it vex whom it may. The fact is that whatever the papacy has ordered or instituted is only designed for the propagation of sin and error. What are the universities, as at present ordered, but, as the book of Maccabees says, "schools of 'Greek fashion' and 'heathenish manners'" (2Macc. 4.12-13), full of dissolute living, where very little is taught of the Holy Scriptures of the Christian faith, and the blind heathen teacher, Aristotle, rules even further than Christ? Now, my advice would be that the books of Aristotle, the Physics, the Metaphysics, Of the Soul, Ethics, which have hitherto been considered the best, be altogether abolished, with all others that profess to treat of nature, though nothing can be learned from them, either of natural or of spiritual things. Besides, no one has been able to understand his meaning, and much time has been wasted and many noble souls vexed with much useless labour, study, and expense. I venture to say that any potter has more knowledge of natural things than is to be found in these books. My heart is grieved to see how many of the best Christians this accursed, proud, knavish heathen has fooled and led astray with his false words. God sent him as a plague for our sins.

Does not the wretched man in his best book, Of the Soul, teach that the soul dies with the body, though many have tried to save him with vain words, as if we had not the Holy Scriptures to teach us fully of all things of which Aristotle had not the slightest perception? Yet this dead heathen has conquered, and has

hindered and almost suppressed the books of the living God; so that, when I see all this misery I cannot but think that the evil spirit has introduced this study.

Then there is the Ethics, which is accounted one of the best, though no book is more directly contrary to God's will and the Christian virtues. Oh that such books could be kept out of the reach of all Christians! Let no one object that I say too much, or speak without knowledge. My friend, I know of what I speak. I know Aristotle as well as you or men like you. I have read him with more understanding than St. Thomas or Scotus, which I may say without arrogance, and can prove if need be. It matters not that so many great minds have exercised themselves in these matters for many hundred years. Such objections do not affect me as they might have done once, since it is plain as day that many more errors have existed for many hundred years in the world and the universities.

I would, however, gladly consent that Aristotle's books of Logic, Rhetoric, and Poetry, should be retained, or they might be usefully studied in a condensed form, to practise young people in speaking and preaching; but the notes and comments should be abolished, and, just as Cicero's Rhetoric is read without note or comment, Aristotle's Logic should be read without such long commentaries. But now neither speaking nor preaching is taught out of them, and they are used only for disputation and toilsomeness. Besides this, there are languages – Latin, Greek, and Hebrew – the mathematics, history; which I recommend to men of higher understanding: and other matters, which will come of themselves, if they seriously strive after reform. And truly it is an important matter, for it concerns the teaching and training of Christian youths and of our noble people, in whom Christianity still abides. Therefore I think that pope and emperor could have no better task than the reformation of the universities, just as there is nothing more devilishly mischievous than an unreformed university.

Physicians I would have to reform their own faculty; lawyers and theologians I take under my charge, and say firstly that it would be right to abolish the canon law entirely, from beginning to end, more especially the decretals. We are taught quite sufficiently in the Bible how we ought to act; all this study only prevents the study of the Scriptures, and for the most part it is tainted with covetousness and pride. And even though there were some good in it, it should nevertheless be destroyed, for the Pope, having the canon law in *scrinio pectoris*,¹⁷ all further study is useless and deceitful. At the present time the canon law is not to be found in the books, but in the whims of the Pope and his sycophants. You may have settled a matter in the best possible way according to the canon law, but the Pope has his *scrinium pectoris*, to which all law must bow in all the world. Now this *scrinium* is oftentimes directed by some knave and the devil himself, whilst it boasts that it is directed by the Holy Ghost. This is the way they treat Christ's poor people, imposing many laws and keeping none, forcing others to keep them or to free themselves by money.

Therefore, since the Pope and his followers have cancelled the whole canon law, despising it and setting their own will above all the world, we should follow them and reject the books. Why should we study them to no purpose? We should never be able to know the Pope's caprice, which has now become the canon law. Let it fall then in God's name, after having risen in the devil's name. Let there be henceforth no *doctor decretorum*, but let them all be *doctores scrinii papalis*, that is, the Pope's sycophants. They say that there is no better temporal government than among the Turks, though they have no canon nor civil law, but only their Koran; we must at least own that there is no worse government than ours, with its canon and civil law, for no estate lives according to the Scriptures, or even according to natural reason.

The civil law, too, good God! What a wilderness it has become! It is, indeed, much better, more skilful, and more honest than the canon law, of which nothing is good but the name. Still there is far too much of it. Surely good governors, in addition to the Holy Scriptures, would be law enough; as St. Paul says, "Is it

¹⁷ In the shrine of his heart.

so that there is not a wise man among you, no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?" (1Cor. 6.5). I think also that the common law and the usage of the country should be preferred to the law of the empire and that the law of the empire should only be used in cases of necessity. And would to God, that, as each land has its own peculiar character and nature, they could all be governed by their own simple laws, just as they were governed before the law of the empire was devised, and as many are governed even now! Elaborate and far-fetched laws are only burdensome to the people, and a hindrance rather than a help to business. But I hope that others have thought of this, and considered it to more purpose than I could.

Our worthy theologians have saved themselves much trouble and labour by leaving the Bible alone and only reading the Sentences.¹⁸ I should have thought that young theologians might begin by studying the Sentences, and that doctors should study the Bible. Now they invert this: the Bible is the first thing they study; this ceases with the Bachelor's degree; the Sentences are the last, and these they keep forever with the Doctor's degree, and this, too, under such sacred obligation that one that is not a priest may read the Bible, but a priest must read the Sentences; so that, as far as I can see, a married man might be a doctor in the Bible, but not in the Sentences. How should we prosper so long as we act so perversely, and degrade the Bible, the holy word of God? Besides this, the Pope orders with many stringent words that his laws be read and used in schools and courts; while the law of the Gospel is but little considered. The result is that in schools and courts the Gospel lies dusty underneath the benches, so that the Pope's mischievous laws may alone be in force.

Since then we hold the name and title of teachers of the Holy Scriptures, we should verily be forced to act according to our title, and to teach the Holy Scriptures and nothing else. Although, indeed, it is a proud, presumptuous title for a man to proclaim himself teacher of the Scriptures, still it could be suffered, if the works confirmed the title. But as it is, under the rule of the Sentences, we find among theologians more human and heathenish fallacies than true holy knowledge of the Scriptures. What then are we to do? I know not, except to pray humbly to God to give us Doctors of Theology. Doctors of Arts, of Medicine, of Law, of the Sentences, may be made by popes, emperors, and the universities; but of this we may be certain: a Doctor of the Holy Scriptures can be made by none but the Holy Ghost, as Christ says, "They shall all be taught of God" (John 6.45). Now the Holy Ghost does not consider red caps or brown, or any other pomp, nor whether we are young or old, layman or priest, monk or secular, virgin or married; no, He once spoke by an ass against the prophet that rode on it. Would to God we were worthy of having such doctors given us, be they laymen or priests, married or unmarried! But now they try to force the Holy Ghost to enter into popes, bishops, or doctors, though there is no sign to show that He is in them.

We must also lessen the number of theological books, and choose the best, for it is not the number of books that makes the learned man, nor much reading, but good books often read, however few, makes a man learned in the Scriptures and pious. Even the Fathers should only be read for a short time as an introduction to the Scriptures. As it is we read nothing else, and never get from them into the Scriptures, as if one should be gazing at the signposts and never follow the road. These good Fathers wished to lead us into the Scriptures by their writings, whereas we lead ourselves out by them, though the Scriptures are our vineyard, in which we should all work and exercise ourselves.

Above all, in schools of all kinds the chief and most common lesson should be the Scriptures, and for young boys the Gospel; and would to God each town had also a girls' school, in which girls might be taught the Gospel for an hour daily, either in German or Latin! In truth, schools, monasteries, and convents were founded for this purpose, and with good Christian intentions, as we read concerning St.

¹⁸ Luther refers here to the "Sentences" of Petrus Lombardus, the so-called *magister sententiarum*, which formed the basis of all dogmatic interpretation from about the middle of the twelfth century down to the Reformation.

Agnes and other saints;¹⁹ then were there holy virgins and martyrs; and in those times it was well with Christendom; but now it has been turned into nothing but praying and singing. Should not every Christian be expected by his ninth or tenth year to know all the holy Gospels, containing as they do his very name and life? A spinner or a seamstress teaches her daughter her trade while she is young, but now even the most learned prelates and bishops do not know the Gospel.

Oh, how badly we treat all these poor young people that are entrusted to us for discipline and instruction! and a heavy reckoning shall we have to give for it that we keep them from the word of God; their fate is that described by Jeremiah: “My eyes fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? When they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers’ bosom” (Lam. 2.11-12). We do not perceive all this misery, how the young folk are being pitifully corrupted in the midst of Christendom, all for want of the Gospel, which we should always read and study with them.

However, even if the high schools studied the Scriptures diligently we should not send everyone to them, as we do now, when nothing is considered but numbers, and every man wishes to have a Doctor’s title; we should only send the aptest pupils, well prepared in the lower schools. This should be seen to by princes or the magistrates of the towns, and they should take care none but apt pupils be sent. But where the Holy Scriptures are not the rule, I advise no one to send his child. Everything must perish where God’s word is not studied unceasingly; and so we see what manner of men there are now in the high schools, and all this is the fault of no one but of the Pope, the bishops, and the prelates, to whom the welfare of the young has been entrusted. For the high schools should only train men of good understanding in the Scriptures, who wish to become bishops and priests, and to stand at our head against heretics and the devil and all the world. But where do we find this? I greatly fear the high schools are nothing but great gates of hell, unless they diligently study the Holy Scriptures and teach them to the young people.

26. Disposition of the Holy Roman Empire

I know well the Romish mob will object and loudly pretend that the Pope took the Holy Roman Empire from the Greek emperor and gave it to Germany, for which honour and favour he is supposed to deserve submission and thanks and all other kinds of returns from the Germans. For this reason they will perhaps assume to oppose all attempts to reform them, and will let no regard be paid to anything but those donations of the Roman Empire. This is also the reason why they have so arbitrarily and proudly persecuted and oppressed many good emperors, so that it were pity to tell, and with the same cleverness they have made themselves lords of all the temporal power and authority, in violation of the holy Gospel; and accordingly I must speak of this matter also.

There is no doubt that the true Roman empire, of which the prophets (Num. 24.24 and Daniel 2.44) spoke, was long ago destroyed, as Balaam clearly foretold, saying, “And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish forever” (Num. 24.24).²⁰ And this was done by the Goths, and more especially since the empire of the Turks was formed, about one thousand years ago, and so gradually Asia and Africa were lost, and subsequently France, Spain, and finally Venice arose, so that Rome retains no part of its former power.

¹⁹ See above, pp. 301, seq.

²⁰ Luther here follows the Vulgate, translating the above verse: “Es werden die Romer kommen und die Juden verstoren: und hernach werden sie auch untergehen.”

Since then the Pope could not force the Greeks and the emperor at Constantinople, who is the hereditary Roman emperor, to obey his will, he invented this device to rob him of his empire and title, and to give it to the Germans, who were at that time strong and of good repute, in order that they might take the power of the Roman empire and hold it of the Pope; and this is what actually has happened. It was taken from the emperor at Constantinople, and the name and title were given to us Germans, and therewith we became subject to the Pope, and he has built up a new Roman empire on the Germans. For the other empire, the original, came to an end long ago, as was said above.

Thus the Roman see has got what it wished: Rome has been taken possession of, and the German emperor driven out and bound by oaths not to dwell in Rome. He is to be Roman emperor and nevertheless not to dwell in Rome, and, moreover, always to depend on the Pope and his followers, and to do their will. We are to have the title, and they are to have the lands and the cities. For they have always made our simplicity the tool of their pride and tyranny, and they consider us as stupid Germans, to be deceived and fooled by them as they choose.

Well, for our Lord God it is a small thing to toss kingdoms and principalities hither and thither; He is so free with them that He will sometimes take a kingdom from a good man and give it to a knave, sometimes through the treachery of false, wicked men, sometimes by inheritance, as we read concerning Persia, Greece, and nearly all kingdoms; and Daniel says, "Wisdom and might are His; and He changes the times and the seasons, and He removes kings and sets up kings" (Dan. 2.20-21). Therefore no one need think it a grand matter if he has a kingdom given to him, especially if he be a Christian; and so we Germans need not be proud of having had a new Roman empire given us. For in His eyes it is a poor gift, that He sometimes gives to the least deserving, as Daniel says, "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan. 4.35).

Now, although the Pope has violently and unjustly robbed the true emperor of the Roman empire, or its name, and has given it to us Germans, yet it is certain that God has used the Pope's wickedness to give the German nation this empire and to raise up a new Roman empire, that exists now, after the fall of the old empire. We gave the Pope no cause for this action, nor did we understand his false aims and schemes; but still, through the craft and knavery of the popes, we have, alas! all too dearly, paid the price of this empire with incalculable bloodshed, with the loss of our liberty, with the robbery of our wealth, especially of our churches and benefices, and with unspeakable treachery and insult. We have the empire in name, but the Pope has our wealth, our honour, our bodies, lives, and souls and all that we have. This was the way to deceive the Germans, and to deceive them by shuffling. What the popes wished was to become emperors; and as they could not do this, they put themselves above the emperors.

Since, then, we have received this empire through God's providence and the schemes of evil men, without our fault, I would not advise that we should give it up, but that we should govern it honestly, in the fear of God, so long as He is pleased to let us hold it. For, as I have said, it is no matter to Him how a kingdom is come by, but He will have it duly governed. If the popes took it from others dishonestly, we at least did not come by it dishonestly. It was given to us through evil men, under the will of God, to whom we have more regard than the false intentions of the popes, who wished to be emperors and more than emperors and to fool and mock us with the name.

The King of Babylon obtained his kingdom by force and robbery; yet God would have it governed by the holy princes Daniel, Ananias, Asarias, and Misael. Much more then, does He require this empire to be governed by the Christian princes of Germany, though the Pope may have stolen, or robbed, or newly fashioned it. It is all God's ordering, which came to pass before we knew of it.

Therefore the Pope and his followers have no reason to boast that they did a great kindness to the German nation in giving them this Roman empire; firstly, because they intended no good to us, in the matter, but only abused our simplicity to strengthen their own power against the Roman emperor at Constantinople, from whom, against God and justice, the Pope has taken what he had no right to.

Secondly, the Pope sought to give the empire, not to us, but to himself, and to become lord over all our power, liberty, wealth, body and soul, and through us over all the world, if God had not prevented it, as he plainly says in his decretals, and has tried with many mischievous tricks in the case of many German emperors. Thus we Germans have been taught in plain German: whilst we expected to become lords, we have become the servants of the most crafty tyrants; we have the name, title, and arms of the empire, but the Pope has the treasure, authority, law, and freedom; thus, whilst the Pope eats the kernel, he leaves us the empty shells to play with.

Now may God help us (who, as I have said, assigned us this kingdom through crafty tyrants, and charged us to govern it) to act according to our name, title, and arms, and to secure our freedom, and thus let the Romans see at last what we have received of God through them. If they boast that they have given us an empire, well, be it so, by all means; then let the Pope give up Rome, all he has of the empire, and free our country from his unbearable taxes and robberies, and give back to us our liberty, authority, wealth, honour, body, and soul, rendering to the empire those things that are the empire's, so as to act in accordance with his words and pretences.

But if he will not do this, what game is he playing with all his falsehoods and pretences? Was it not enough to lead this great people by the nose for so many hundred years? Because the Pope crowns or makes the Emperor, it does not follow that he is above him; for the prophet, St. Samuel, anointed and crowned King Saul and David, at God's command, and was yet subject to them. And the prophet Nathan anointed King Solomon, and yet was not placed over him; moreover, St. Elisha let one of his servants anoint King Jehu of Israel, yet they obeyed him. And it has never yet happened in the whole world that any one was above the king because he consecrated or crowned him, except in the case of the Pope.

Now he is himself crowned pope by three cardinals; yet they are subject to him, and he is above them. Why, then, contrary to his own example and to the doctrine and practice of the whole world and the Scriptures, should he exalt himself above the temporal authorities, and the empire, for no other reason than that he crowns, and consecrates the Emperor? It suffices that he is above him in all divine matters – that is, in preaching, teaching, and the ministration of the Sacrament – in which matters, however, every priest or bishop is above all other men, just as St. Ambrose in his chair was above the Emperor Theodosius, and the prophet Nathan above David, and Samuel above Saul. Therefore let the German emperor be a true free emperor, and let not his authority or his sword be overborne by these blind pretences of the Pope's sycophants, as if they were to be exceptions, and be above the temporal sword in all things.

27. Defects of the Temporal Estates

Let this be enough about the faults of the spiritual estate, though many more might be found, if the matter were properly considered; we must now consider the defects of the temporal estates. In the first place, we require a general law and consent of the German nation against profusion and extravagance in dress, which is the cause of so much poverty among the nobles and the people. Surely God has given to us, as to other nations, enough wool, fur, flax, and whatever else is required for the decent clothing of every class; and it cannot be necessary to spend such enormous sums for silk, velvet, cloth of gold, and all other kinds of outlandish stuff. I think that even if the Pope did not rob us Germans with his unbearable taxes, we

should be robbed more than enough by these secret thieves, the dealers in silk and velvet. As it is, we see that every man wishes to be every other man's equal, and that this causes and increases pride and envy among us, as we deserve, all which would cease, with many other misfortunes, if our self-will would but let us be gratefully content with what God has given us.

It is similarly necessary to diminish the use of spices, which is one of the ships in which our gold is sent away from Germany. God's mercy has given us more food, and that both precious and good, than is to be found in other countries. I shall probably be accused of making foolish and impossible suggestions, as if I wished to destroy the great business of commerce. But I am only doing my part; if the community does not mend matters, every man should do it himself. I do not see many good manners that have ever come into a land through commerce, and therefore God let the people of Israel dwell far from the sea and not carry on much trade.

But without doubt the greatest misfortune of the Germans is buying on usury. But for this, many a man would have to leave unbought his silk, velvet, cloth of gold, spices, and all other luxuries. The system has not been in force for more than one hundred years, and has already brought poverty, misery, and destruction on almost all princes, foundations, cities, nobles, and heirs. If it continues for another hundred years Germany will be left without a farthing, and we shall be reduced to eating one another. The devil invented this system, and the Pope has done an injury to the whole world by sanctioning it.

My request and my cry therefore is this: Let each man consider the destruction of himself and his family, which is no longer at the door, but has entered the house; and let emperors, princes, lords, and corporations see to the condemnation and prohibition of this kind of trade, without considering the opposition of the Pope and all his justice and injustice, nor whether livings or endowments depend upon it. Better a single fief in a city based on a freehold estate or honest interest, than a hundred based on usury; yea, a single endowment on usury is worse and more grievous than twenty based on freehold estate. Truly this usury is a sign and warning that the world has been given over to the devil for its sins, and that we are losing our spiritual and temporal welfare alike; yet we heed it not.

Doubtless we should also find some bridle for the Fuggers and similar companies. Is it possible that in a single man's lifetime such great wealth should be collected together, if all were done rightly and according to God's will? I am not skilled in accounts, but I do not understand how it is possible for one hundred guilders to gain twenty in a year, or how one guilder can gain another, and that not out of the soil, or by cattle, seeing that possessions depend not on the wit of men, but on the blessing of God. I commend this to those that are skilled in worldly affairs. I as a theologian blame nothing but the evil appearance, of which St. Paul says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1Thess. 5.22). All I know is that it were much more godly to encourage agriculture and lessen commerce; and that they do the best who, according to the Scriptures, till the ground to get their living, as we are all commanded in Adam: "Cursed is the ground for your sake. . . . Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you. . . . In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread" (Gen. 3.17-19). There is still much ground that is not ploughed or tilled.

Then there is the excess in eating and drinking, for which we Germans have an ill reputation in foreign countries, as our special vice, and which has become so common, and gained so much the upper hand, that sermons avail nothing. The loss of money caused by it is not the worst; but in its train come murder, adultery, theft, blasphemy, and all vices. The temporal power should do something to prevent it; otherwise it will come to pass, as Christ foretold, that the last day shall come as a thief in the night, and shall find them eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, planting and building, buying and selling (Matt. 24.38; Luke 17.26), just as things go on now, and that so strongly that I apprehend lest the day of judgment be at hand, even now when we least expect it.

Lastly, is it not a terrible thing that we Christians should maintain public brothels, though we all vow chastity in our baptism? I well know all that can be said on this matter: that it is not peculiar to one nation, that it would be difficult to demolish it, and that it is better thus than that virgins, or married women, or honourable women should be dishonoured. But should not the spiritual and temporal powers combine to find some means of meeting these difficulties without any such heathen practice? If the people of Israel existed without this scandal, why should not a Christian nation be able to do so? How do so many towns and villages manage to exist without these houses? Why should not great cities be able to do so?

In all, however, that I have said above, my object has been to show how much good temporal authority might do, and what should be the duty of all authorities, so that every man might learn what a terrible thing it is to rule and to have the chief place. What boots it if a ruler is in his own person as holy as St. Peter, if he is not diligent to help his subjects in these matters? His very authority will be his condemnation; for it is the duty of those in authority to seek the good of their subjects. But if those in authority considered how young people might be brought together in marriage, the prospect of marriage would help every man and protect him from temptations.

But as it is every man is induced to become a priest or a monk; and of all these I am afraid not one in a hundred has any other motive but the wish of getting a livelihood and the uncertainty of maintaining a family. Therefore they begin by a dissolute life and sow their wild oats, (as they say), but I fear they rather gather in a store of wild oats.²¹ I hold the proverb to be true, “Most men become monks and priests in desperation.” That is why things are as we see them.

But in order that many sins may be prevented that are becoming too common, I would honestly advise that no boy or girl be allowed to take the vow of chastity or to enter a religious life before the age of thirty years. For this requires a special grace, as St. Paul says. Therefore, unless God specially urge anyone to a religious life, he will do well to leave all vows and devotions alone. I say further, If a man has so little faith in God as to fear that he will be unable to maintain himself in the married state, and if this fear is the only thing that makes him become a priest, then I implore him, for his own soul’s sake, not to become a priest, but rather to become a peasant, or what he will. For if simple trust in God be necessary to ensure temporal support, tenfold trust in God is necessary to live a religious life. If you do not trust to God for your worldly food, how can you trust to Him for your spiritual food? Alas! This unbelief and want of faith destroys all things, and leads us into all misery, as we see among all conditions of men.

Much might be said concerning all this misery. Young people have no one to look after them, they are left to go on just as they like, and those in authority are of no more use to them than if they did not exist, though this should be the chief care of the Pope, of bishops, lords, and councils. They wish to rule over everything, everywhere, and yet they are of no use. Oh, what a rare sight, for these reasons, will a lord or ruler be in heaven, though he might build a hundred churches to God and raise all the dead!

But this may suffice for the present. For of what concerns the temporal authority and the nobles I have, I think, said enough in my tract on Good Works. For their lives and governments leave room enough for improvement; but there is no comparison between spiritual and temporal abuses, as I have there shown. I daresay I have sung a lofty strain, so that I have proposed many things that will be thought impossible, and attacked many points too sharply. But what was I to do? I was bound to say this: if I had the power, this is what I would do. I had rather incur the world’s anger than God’s; they cannot take from me more than my life. I have hitherto made many offers of peace to my adversaries; but, as I see, God has forced me through them to open my mouth wider and wider, and, because they do not keep quiet, to give them enough cause for speaking, barking, shouting, and writing. Well, then, I have another song still to sing

²¹ Luther uses the expression *ausbuben* in the sense of *sich austoben*, viz., “to storm out one’s passions,” and then coins the word *sich einbuben*, viz., “to storm in one’s passions.”

concerning them and Rome; if they wish to hear it, I will sing it to them, and sing with all my might. Do you understand, my friend Rome, what I mean?

I have frequently offered to submit my writings for inquiry and examination, but in vain, though I know, if I am in the right, I must be condemned upon earth and justified by Christ alone in heaven. For all the Scriptures teach us that the affairs of Christians and Christendom must be judged by God alone; they have never yet been justified by men in this world, but the opposition has always been too strong. My greatest care and fear is lest my cause be not condemned by men, by which I should know for certain that it does not please God. Therefore let them go freely to work, pope, bishop, priest, monk, or doctor; they are the true people to persecute the truth, as they have always done. May God grant us all a Christian understanding, and especially to the Christian nobility of the German nation true spiritual courage, to do what is best for our unhappy Church. Amen!

At Wittenberg, in the year 1520.

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