

**HENRY EYSTER JACOBS, MARTIN
LUTHER**

**WORKS OF MARTIN
LUTHER, WITH
INTRODUCTIONS AND
NOTES (VOLUME II)**

Henry Eyster Jacobs
Martin Luther
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with Introductions
and Notes (Volume II)

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Works of Martin Luther, with Introductions and Notes (Volume II):*

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**A TREATISE CONCERNING
THE BLESSED SACRAMENT OF
THE HOLY AND TRUE BODY
OF CHRIST AND CONCERNING
THE BROTHERHOODS**

1519

INTRODUCTION

This treatise belongs to a series of four which appeared in the latter half of the year 1519, the others treating of the Ban, Penance, and Baptism. The latter two with our treatise form a trilogy which Luther dedicates to the Duchess Margaret of Braunschweig and Lüneburg.

He undertakes the work, as he says, "because there are so many troubled and distressed ones—and I myself have had the experience—who do not know what the holy sacraments, full of all grace, are, nor how to use them, but, alas! presume upon quieting their consciences with their works, instead of seeking peace in God's grace through the holy sacrament; so completely are the holy sacraments obscured and withdrawn from us by the teaching of men."¹

In a letter to Spalatin² of December 18, 1519, he says that no one need expect treatises from him on the other sacraments, since he cannot acknowledge them as such.

A copy from the press of John Grüenberg of Wittenberg reached Duke George of Saxony by December 24, 1519, who on December 27th already entered his protest against it with the Elector Frederick and the Bishops of Meissen and Merseburg³.

¹ See Clemen, I, p. 175.

² Enders, II, no. 254. Smith, *Luther's Correspondence*, I, no. 206.

³ Gess, *Akten und Briefe zur Kirchenpolitik Herzog Georgs von Sachsen*, Leipzig,

Duke George took exception particularly to Luther's advocacy of the two kinds in the Communion⁴. This statement of Luther, however, was but incidental to his broad and rich treatment of the subject of the treatise.

It was Luther's first extended statement of his view of the Lord's Supper. As such it is very significant, not only because of what he says, but also because of what he does not say. There is no reference at all to that which was then distinctive of the Church's doctrine, the sacrifice of the mass. Luther has already abandoned this position, but is either too loyal a church-man to attack it or has not as yet found an evangelical interpretation of the idea of sacrifice in the mass, such as he gives us in the later treatise on the New Testament⁵. However, already in this treatise he gives us the antidote for the false doctrine of sacrifice in the emphasis laid upon faith, on which all depends⁶. The object of this faith, however, is not yet stated to be the promise of the forgiveness of sins contained in the Words of Institution, which are a new and eternal testament⁷.

The treatise shows the influence of the German mystics⁸ on Luther's thought, but much more of the Scriptures which furnish

1905.

⁴ See below, p. 9.

⁵ In this edition, Vol. I, pp. 294-336. See especially pp. 312 ff.

⁶ See below, pp. 19, 25.

⁷ *Treatise on the New Testament*, Vol. I, pp. 297 ff.

⁸ See Köstlin, *Luther's Theologie*, I, 292 f.; also Hering, *Die Mystik Luthers*, Leipzig, 1879, pp. 171-174.

him with argument and illustration for his mystical conceptions. Christ's natural body is made of less importance than the spiritual body⁹, the communion of saints; just as in the later treatise on the New Testament the stress is placed on the Words of Institution with their promise of the forgiveness of sins. Luther does not try to explain philosophically what is inexplicable, but is content to accept on faith the act of the presence of Christ in the sacrament, "how and where,—we leave to Him."¹⁰

Of interest is the emphasis on the spiritual body, the communion of saints. Luther knows that although excommunication is exclusion from external communion, it is not necessarily exclusion from real spiritual communion with Christ and His saints¹¹. No wonder, then, that he can later treat the papal bull with so much indifference; it cannot exclude him from the communion of saints.

The treatise consists of three main divisions: sections 1 to 3 treating of the outward sign of the sacrament; sections 4 to 16, of the inner significance; sections 17 to 22, of faith. Added to this is the appendix on the subject of the brotherhoods or sodalities, associations of laymen or charitable and devotional purposes. Of these there were many at this time, Wittenberg alone being reported as having twenty-one. Luther objects not only to their immoral conduct, but also to the spiritual pride

⁹ See below, p. 23.

¹⁰ See below, p.20.

¹¹ See *Treatise concerning the Ban*, below, p. 37.

which they engendered. He finds in the communion of saints the fundamental brotherhood instituted in the holy sacrament, the common brotherhood of all saints.

The modern world needs to have these truths driven home anew, and, barring a few scholastic phrases here and there, cannot find them better expressed than in the remarkably elevated and devotional language of Luther in this treatise.

The text of the treatise is found in the following editions: Weimar Ed., vol. ii, 742; Erlangen Ed., vol. xxvii, 28; Walch Ed., Vol. xix, 522; St. Louis Ed., xix, 426; Clemen, vol. i, 196; Berlin Ed., vol. iii, 259.

Literature besides that mentioned:

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A TREATISE CONCERNING THE BLESSED SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY AND TRUE BODY OF CHRIST AND CONCERNING THE BROTHERHOODS

1519

1. Like the sacrament of holy baptism¹² the holy sacrament of the altar, or of the holy and true body of Christ, has three parts which it is necessary or us to know. The first is the sacrament, or sign, the second is the significance of this sacrament, the third is the faith required by both of these; the three parts which must be found in every sacrament. The sacrament must be external and visible, and have some material form; the significance must be internal and spiritual, within the spirit of man; faith must apply and use both these.

[Sidenote: The First Part of the Sacrament: the Sign]

2. The sacrament, or outward sign, is in the form of bread and wine, just as baptism has as its sign water; although the sign is not

¹² See *Treatise on Baptism*, Vol. I, pp. 56 ff.

simply the form of bread and wine, but the use of the bread and wine in eating and drinking, just as the water of baptism is used by immersion or by pouring. For the sacrament, or sign, must be received, or must at least be desired, if it is to work a blessing. Although at present the two kinds are not given the people daily, as of old,—nor is this necessary,—yet the priesthood partakes of it daily in the sight of the people, and it is enough that the people desire it daily and receive one kind at the proper time, as the Christian Church ordains and offers¹³.

3. I deem it well, however, that the Church in a general council should again decree¹⁴ that all persons, as well as the priests, be given both kinds. Not that one kind were insufficient, since indeed the simple desire of faith suffices, as St. Augustine says: "Why preparest thou stomach and teeth? Only believe and thou hast already partaken of the sacrament";¹⁵ but because it would be meet and right that the form, or sign, of the sacrament be given not in part only, but in its entirety, just as I have said of baptism¹⁶ that it were more fitting to immerse than to pour the water, for the sake of the completeness and perfection of the sign. For this sacrament signifies the complete union and the undivided fellowship of the saints, as we shall see, and this is poorly and unfittingly indicated by only one part of the sacrament. Nor is

¹³ Note the advance in *The Babylonian Captivity*, below, pp. 178 ff.

¹⁴ Cf. *Babylonian Captivity*, below, p. 186.

¹⁵ Cf. *Sermo*, 112, cap. 5 (Migne, xxxviii, 615).

¹⁶ See Vol. I, p. 56.

there as great a danger in the use of the cup as is supposed, since the people seldom go to this sacrament, and Christ was well aware of all future dangers¹⁷, and yet saw it to institute both kinds or the use of all His Christians.

[Sidenote: The Second Part of the Sacrament: the Significance]

4. *The significance or purpose of this sacrament is the fellowship of all saints, whence it derives its common name synaxis or communio, that is, fellowship; and communicare means to take part in this fellowship, or as we say, to go to the sacrament, because Christ and all saints are one spiritual body, just as the inhabitants of a city are one community and body, each citizen being a member of the other and a member of the entire city. All the saints, therefore, are members of Christ and of the Church, which is a spiritual and eternal city of God, and whoever is taken into this city is said to be received into the community of saints, and to be incorporated into Christ's spiritual body and made a member of Him. On the other hand, excommunicare means to put out of the community and to sever a member from this body, and that is called in our language "putting one under the ban"; yet there is a difference, as I shall show in the following treatise, concerning the ban¹⁸.*

To receive the bread and wine of this sacrament, then, is

¹⁷ E. g., the danger of spilling the wine.

¹⁸ See [p. 37](#).

nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all saints. As though a citizen were given a sign, a document, or some other token as a proof that he is a citizen of the city, a member of the community. Even so St. Paul says: "We are all one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of one bread and of one cup." [1 Cor. 10:17]

5. This fellowship is of such a nature that all the spiritual possessions of Christ and His saints¹⁹ are imparted and communicated to him who receives this sacrament; again, all his sufferings and sins are communicated to them, and thus love engenders love and unites all. To carry out our homely figure: it is like a city where every citizen shares with all the others the name, honor, freedom, trade, customs, usages, help, support, protection and the like, of that city, and on the other hand shares all the danger of fire and flood, enemies and death, losses, imposts and the like. For he who would have part in the common profits must also share in the losses, and ever recompense love with love. Here we see that whoever wrongs a citizen wrongs the entire city and all the citizens; whoever benefits one deserves favor and thanks from all the others. So, too, in our natural body, as St. Paul says in i Corinthians xii, where this sacrament is given a spiritual explanation: the members have a care one or another; whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; whether one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. [1 Cor.

¹⁹ Used here and above in the New Testament sense of true Christians, living or dead, cf. 1 Cor. 1:2.

12:25 f.] It is apparent then that if any one's foot hurts him, nay, even the smallest toe, the eye at once looks toward it, the fingers grasp it, the face frowns, the whole body bends to it, and all are concerned with this small member; on the other hand, if it is cared for, all the other members rejoice. This figure must be well weighed if one wishes to understand this sacrament; for the Scriptures employ it or the sake of the unlearned.

6. In this sacrament, therefore, God Himself gives through the priest a sure sign to man, to show that, in like manner, he shall be united with Christ and His saints and have all things in common with them; that Christ's sufferings and life shall be his own, together with the lives and sufferings of all the saints, so that whoever does him an injury does injury to Christ and all the saints, as He says by the prophet, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of My eye" [Zech. 2:8]; on the other hand, whoever does him a kindness does it to Christ and all His saints, as He says, "What ye have done unto one of the least of My brethren, that ye have done unto Me." [Matt. 25:40] Again, he must be willing to share all the burdens and misfortunes of Christ and His saints, their sorrow and joy. These two sides of the fellowship we shall consider more fully.

7. Now, adversity assails us in more than one form. There is, in the first place, the sin remaining in our flesh after baptism, the inclination to anger, hatred, pride and unchastity, and so forth, which assails us as long as we live. Against this we not only need the help of the congregation and of Christ, in order that they

may fight with us against it, but it is also necessary that Christ and His saints intercede for us before God, that sin may not be accounted to us according to God's strict judgment. Therefore, in order to give us strength and courage against these sins, God gives us this sacrament, as though He said: "Behold, many kinds of sin assail thee; take this sign by which I give thee My pledge that sin assails not only thee but My Son Christ, and all His saints in heaven and on earth. Therefore, be bold and confident; thou fightest not alone; great help and support are round about thee." King David, also, says of this bread: "The bread strengtheneth man's heart" [Ps. 104:15]; and the Scriptures in other places characterize this sacrament as a strengthening. So in Acts ix it is written of St. Paul that he was baptised and when he had received meat, he was strengthened. [Acts 9:19] In the second place, the evil spirit assails us unceasingly with many sins and afflictions. In the third place, the world is full of wickedness and entices and persecutes us and is altogether bad. Finally, our own guilty conscience assails us with our past sins, with the fear of death, and with the pains of hell. All of these afflictions make us weary and weaken us, unless we seek and find strength in this fellowship.

8. If any one be in despair, if he be distressed by his sinful conscience or terrified by death, or have any other burden on his heart, and desire to be rid of them all, let him go joyfully to the sacrament of the altar and lay down his grief in the midst of the congregation and seek help from the entire company of the

spiritual body; just as when a citizen whose property has suffered injury or misfortune at the hands of his enemies makes complaint to his town council and fellow citizens and asks them for help. Therefore, the immeasurable grace and mercy of God are given us in this sacrament, that we may there lay down all misery and tribulation and put it on the congregation, and especially on Christ, and may joyfully strengthen and comfort ourselves and say: "Though I am a sinner and have fallen, though this or that misfortune has befallen me, I will go to the sacrament to receive a sign from God that I have on my side Christ's righteousness, He and sufferings, with all holy angels and all the blessed in heaven, and all pious men on earth. If I die, I am not alone in death; if I suffer, they suffer with me. I have shared all my misfortune with Christ and the saints, since I have a sure sign of their love toward me." Lo, this is the benefit to be derived from this sacrament, this is the use we should make of it; then the heart cannot but rejoice and be comforted.

9. When you have partaken of this sacrament, therefore, or desire to partake of it, you must in turn also share the misfortunes of the congregation, as was said²⁰. But what are these? Christ in heaven and the angels together with all the saints have no misfortunes of their own, save when injury is done to the truth and to God's Word; yea, as we said, every bane and blessing of all the saints on earth affects them. There your heart must go out in love and devotion and learn that this sacrament is a

²⁰ See p. 11.

sacrament of love, and that love and service are given you and you again must render love and service to Christ and His needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in His holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing: you must fight, work, pray, and, if you cannot do more, have heartfelt sympathy. That is bearing in your turn the misfortune and adversity of Christ and His saints. Here the saying of Paul applies. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." [Gal. 6:2] Lo, thus you uphold them all, thus they all again in turn uphold you, and all things are in common, both good and evil. Then all things become easy, and the evil spirit cannot prevail against such a community. When Christ instituted the sacrament He said: "This is My body which is given for you, this is My blood which is shed for you; as oft as ye do this, remember Me." [Luke 22:19 f.] As though He said: "I am the Head, I will first give Myself for you, will make your suffering and misfortune Mine own and bear it for you, that you in your turn may do the same or Me and for one another, have all things in common in Me and with Me, and let this sacrament be unto you a sure token of this all, that you may not forget Me, but daily call to mind and admonish one another by what I have done or you and still am doing, that you may be strengthened thereby, and also bear with one another."

10. This is also a reason, indeed the chief reason, why this sacrament is received many times, while baptism is administered

but once. Baptism is the beginning and entrance to a new life, in the course of which boundless adversities assail us through sins and suffering, our own and those of others. The devil, the world and our own flesh and conscience, as was said²¹ never cease to pursue us and oppress us. Therefore we need the strength, support and help of Christ and of His saints, which are pledged us in this sacrament as by a sure token, by which we are made one with them and are incorporated with them, and all our suffering is laid down in the midst of the congregation. Therefore, this holy sacrament is of little or no benefit to those who have no misfortune or anxiety or do not feel their adversity. For it is given only to those who need strength and comfort, who have timid hearts and terrified consciences, and who are assailed by sin, or have even fallen into sin. What could it do or untroubled and falsely secure spirits, which neither need nor desire it? For the Mother of God²² says, "He filleth only the hungry, and comforteth them that are distressed." [Luke 1:53]

11. That the disciples, therefore, might by all means be worthy and well prepared for this sacrament He first made them sorrowful, held before them His departure and death, by which they were exceeding troubled. And then He greatly terrified them when He said that one of them should betray Him. [Matt. 25:21 ff.] When they were thus full of sorrow and anxiety and were concerned about the sorrow and sin of betrayal, then they were

²¹ See above, pp. 12, 13, and Vol. I, pp. 59 ff.

²² The virgin Mary.

worthy, and He gave them His holy Body to strengthen them. By which He teaches us that this sacrament is strength and comfort for those whom sin and evil trouble and distress; as St. Augustine also says²³, "This food demands only hungry souls and is shunned by none so greatly as by a sated soul which does not need it." Just as the Jews were required to eat the Passover with bitter herbs, standing and in haste, which also signifies that this sacrament demands souls that are desirous, needy and sorrowful. Now if one will make the afflictions of Christ and of all Christians his own, will defend the truth, oppose unrighteousness, help bear the need of the innocent and the sufferings of all Christians, he will find affliction and adversity enough, besides that which his evil nature, the world, the devil and sin daily inflict upon him. And it is God's will and purpose to set so many hounds upon us and drive us, and everywhere provide us bitter herbs, that we may long for this strength and take delight in the holy sacrament, and thus be worthy of it, that is, desire it.

12. It is His will, then, that we partake of it frequently, in order that we may remember Him and exercise ourselves in this fellowship according to His example. For if His example were no longer kept before us, the fellowship also would soon be forgotten. So we at present see to our sorrow that many masses are held and yet the Christian fellowship which should be preached, practiced and kept before us by Christ's example has quite perished; so that we hardly know what purpose this

²³ Cf. *Enarratio in Ps. XXI* (Migne, xxxvi, 178).

sacrament serves, or how it should be used, nay, with our masses we frequently destroy this fellowship and pervert everything. This is the fault of the preachers who do not preach the Gospel nor the sacraments, but their humanly devised fables concerning the many works²⁴ to be done and the ways to live aright.

But in times past this sacrament was so properly used, and the people were taught to understand this fellowship so well, that they even gathered material food and goods²⁵ in the church and there distributed them among those who were in need, as St. Paul writes [1 Cor. 11:21]. Of this we have a relic in the word "collect,"²⁶ which still remains in the mass, and means a general collection, just as a common fund is gathered to be given to the poor. That was the time when so many became martyrs and saints. There were fewer masses, but much strength and blessing resulted from the masses; Christians cared for one another, assisted one another, sympathized with one another, bore one another's burden and affliction. This has all disappeared, and there remain only the many masses and the many who receive this sacrament without in the least understanding or practicing what it signifies.

13. There are those, indeed, who would share the benefits but not the cost, that is, who gladly hear in this sacrament that the help, fellowship and assistance of all the saints are promised and

²⁴ Penitential works.

²⁵ Cf. Acts 2:46.

²⁶ See Vol. I, p. 310.

given to them, but who, because they fear the world, are unwilling in their turn to contribute to this fellowship, to help the poor, to endure sins, to care for the sick, to suffer with the suffering, to intercede for others, to defend the truth, to seek the reformation of the Church and of all Christians at the risk of life, property and honor. They are unwilling to suffer disfavor, harm, shame or death, although it is God's will that they be driven, for the sake of the truth and their neighbors, to desire the great grace and strength of this sacrament. They are self-seeking persons, whom this sacrament does not benefit. Just as we could not endure a citizen who wanted to be helped, protected and made free by the community, and yet in his turn would do nothing for it nor serve it. No, we on our part must make others' evil our own, if we desire Christ and His saints to make our evil their own; then will the fellowship be complete and justice be done to the sacrament. For the sacrament has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a man that he is made one with all others.

14. To symbolize this fellowship, God has appointed such signs of the sacrament as in every way serve this purpose and by their very form incite and move us to this fellowship. Just as the bread is made out of many grains which have been ground and mixed together, and out of the many bodies of grain there comes the one body of the bread, in which each grain loses its form and body and acquires the common body of the bread, and as the drops of wine losing their own form become the body of one wine: so should it be with us, and is, indeed, if we use

this sacrament aright. Christ with all saints, by His love, takes upon Himself our form, fights with us against sin, death and all evil [Phil. 2:7]; this enkindles in us such love that we take His form, rely upon His righteousness, life and blessedness, and through the interchange of His blessings and our misfortunes are one loaf, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common. This is a great sacrament,[Eph. 5:32]²⁷ says Paul, that Christ and the Church are one flesh and bone [Eph. 5:31]. Again, through this same love are to be changed and to make the infirmities of all other Christians our own, take upon ourselves their form and their necessity and make theirs all the good that is within our power, that they may enjoy it [Judg. 9:2]. That is a real fellowship, and that is the true significance of this sacrament. In this way we are changed into one another and are brought into fellowship with one another by love, without which there can be no such change.

15. He appointed this twofold form, bread and wine, rather than any other, as a further indication of the union and fellowship in this sacrament. For there is no more intimate, deep and inseparable union than the union of the food with him who partakes of it, since the food enters into and is assimilated with his very nature and becomes one with his being. Other unions, effected by means of nails, glue, cords and the like, do not make one indivisible substance of the objects joined together. In the

²⁷ In the Vulgate the Greek word "mystery" is translated by *sacramentum*. See below, p. 258.

sacrament we become united with Christ, and are made one body with all the saints, so that He concerns Himself for us, acts in our behalf, as though He were what we are—what concerns us concerns Him as much as us, and even more than us; and, on the other hand, that we also concern ourselves or Him, as though we were what He is, as indeed we shall finally be, when we are conformed to His likeness, as St. John says, "We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him" [1 John 3:2]; so complete is the fellowship of Christ and all the saints with us. Our sins assail Him, His righteousness protects us; for the union makes all things common, until at last He completely destroys sin in us and makes us like unto Himself, at the last day. In like manner, by the same love we are to be united with our neighbors, we in them and they in us.

16. In addition to this, He did not appoint this twofold form by itself, but gave His true natural flesh, in the bread, and His natural and true blood, in the wine, that He might give us a really perfect sacrament or sign. For just as the bread is changed²⁸ into His true natural body and the wine into His true natural blood, so truly are we also drawn and changed into the spiritual body, that is, into the fellowship of Christ and all saints, and put by this sacrament in possession of all the virtues and mercies of Christ and His saints; as was said above²⁹ of a citizen who is taken and incorporated into the city and the protection and freedom

²⁸ Luther still adheres to the doctrine of transubstantiation. But see below, pp. 187 ff.

²⁹ See p. 11.

of the entire community. Therefore He instituted not simply the one form, but the two separate forms, His flesh under the bread, His blood under the wine, to indicate that not only His life and good works, which are represented by His flesh and which He accomplished in His flesh, but also His passion and martyrdom, which are represented by His blood and in which He shed His blood, are all our own, and by being drawn into this fellowship we may use and enjoy them.

17. All this makes it clear that this holy sacrament is naught else than a divine sign, in which Christ and all saints are pledged, granted and imparted, with all their works, sufferings, merits, mercies and possessions, or the comfort and strengthening of all who are in anxiety and sorrow, and are persecuted by the devil, sin, the world, the flesh and every evil; and that to receive the sacrament is nothing else than to desire all this and firmly to believe that it shall be done.

[Sidenote: The Third part of the Sacrament: Faith]

There follows the third part of the sacrament, that is faith, on which all depends. For it is not enough to know what the sacrament is and signifies. It is not enough that you know it is a fellowship and a gracious exchange or blending of our sin and suffering with the righteousness of Christ and His saints; you must also desire it and firmly believe that you have received it. Here the devil and our own nature wage their fiercest fight, that faith may by no means stand firm. There are those who practice their arts and subtleties to such an extent that they ask where

the bread remains when it is changed into Christ's flesh, and the wine when it is changed into His blood; also in what manner the whole Christ, His flesh and His blood, can be comprehended in so small a portion of bread and wine. What does it matter? It is enough to know that it is a divine sign, in which Christ's flesh and blood are truly present—how and where, we leave to Him.³⁰

18. See to it that you exercise and strengthen your faith, so that when you are sorrowful or your sins afflict you and you go to the sacrament or hear mass, you do so with a hearty desire for this sacrament and for what it means, and doubt not that you have what the sacrament signifies, that is, that you are certain Christ and all His saints come to you bringing all their virtues, sufferings and mercies, to live, work, suffer and die with you, and be wholly yours, to have all things in common with you. If you will exercise and strengthen this faith, you will experience what a rich and joyous wedding-supper and festival your God has prepared upon the altar or you. Then you will understand what the great feast of King Ahasuerus signifies [Esth. 1:5], you will see what that wedding is for which God has slain His oxen and fatlings, as it is written in the Gospel [Matt. 22:2 ff.], and your heart will grow right free and confident, strong and courageous, against all enemies. For who will fear any calamity if he is sure that Christ and all His saints are with Him and share all things, evil or good, in common with him? So we read that the disciples of Christ broke this bread and ate with great gladness of heart.

³⁰ Cf. below, p. 192.

Since, then, this work is so great that our insignificant souls dare not desire it, to say nothing of hoping for or expecting it, it is necessary and profitable to go often to the sacrament, or at least in the daily mass to exercise and strengthen this faith, on which all depends and for the sake of which it was instituted. For if you doubt³¹ you do God the greatest dishonor and regard Him as unfaithful and a liar. If you cannot believe, pray for faith, as was said above in the other treatise³².

19. See to it also that you make yourself a fellow of every man and by no means exclude any one in hatred or anger; for this sacrament of fellowship, love and unity cannot tolerate discord and dissension. You must let the infirmities and needs of others burden your heart, as though they were your own, and offer them your strength, as though it were their own, as Christ does for you in the sacrament. That is what we mean by being changed into one another through love, out of many particles becoming one bread and drink, giving up one's own form and taking one that belongs to all.³³

For this reason slanderers and those who wickedly judge and despise others cannot but receive death in the sacrament, as St. Paul writes [1 Cor. 11:29]. For they do not unto their neighbor

³¹ See Luther's explanation of the First Commandment in the Catechisms. Also the answer to the last question in Part V, Small Catechism.

³² *Treatise on Penance* (Weimer Ed., II, 721), where Luther exhorts the troubled conscience to pray with the father of the lunatic boy, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief," and with the Apostles, "Lord, increase our faith."

³³ Cf. above, p. 17.

what they seek from Christ and what the sacrament indicates; they wish them no good, have no sympathy with them, do not receive them as they desire to be received by Christ, and then all into such blindness that they do not know what else to do in this sacrament except to fear and honor Christ in the sacrament with their prayers and devotion. When they have done this they think they have done their whole duty, although Christ has given His body for this purpose, that the significance of the sacrament, that is, fellowship and mutual love, may be put into practice, and His own natural body be less regarded than His spiritual body,³⁴ which is the fellowship of His saints. What concerns Him most, especially in this sacrament, is that faith in the fellowship with Him and with His saints may be rightly exercised and become strong in us, and that we, in accordance with it, may rightly exercise our fellowship with one another. This purpose of Christ they do not perceive and, in their devoutness, they daily say and hear mass, and remain every day the same; nay, become worse daily, and mark it not.

Therefore take heed; it is more needful that you discern the spiritual than that you discern the natural body of Christ, and faith in the spiritual is more needful than faith in the natural. For the natural without the spiritual profiteth us nothing in this sacrament; a change³⁵ must occur and manifest itself through love.

³⁴ The Church.

³⁵ A transubstantiation in the communicant.

20. *There are many who, regardless of this change of love and faith, rely upon the fact that the mass or the sacrament is, as they say, opus gratum opere operato, that is, a work which of itself pleases God, even though they who perform it do not please Him. From this they conclude that, however unworthily masses are said, it is none the less a good thing to have many masses, since the harm comes to those who say or use them unworthily. I grant every one his opinion, but such fables please me not. For, if you desire to speak thus, there is no creature nor work that does not of itself please God, as is written, "God saw all His works and they pleased Him." [Gen. 1:31] What good can result therefrom, if one misuse bread, wine, gold, and every good creature, though of themselves they are pleasing to God? Nay, condemnation is the result. So too, here: the more precious the sacrament, the greater the harm which comes upon the whole congregation from its misuse. For it was not instituted or its own sake, that it might please God, but for our sake, that we might use it rightly, exercise our faith by it, and by it become pleasing to God. If it is merely an opus operatum³⁶, it works only harm; it must become an opus operantis³⁷. Just as bread and wine work only harm if they are not used, no matter how much they please God of themselves; so it is not enough that the sacrament be prepared (that is, opus operatum), it must also be used in faith (that is, opus operantis). And we must take heed lest with such dangerous*

³⁶ A work that is done without reference to the doer of it.

³⁷ A work considered with reference to the doer of it.

glosses our minds be turned away from the sacrament's power and virtue, and faith perish entirely through such false security in the outwardly completed sacrament. All this results because they give heed in this sacrament to Christ's natural body more than to the fellowship, the spiritual body. Christ on the cross was also a completed work³⁸, which was well-pleasing to God; but the Jews unto this day have found it a stumbling block, for the reason that they did not make of it a work that must be used in faith³⁹. See to it, then, that the sacrament be or you an *opus operantis*, that is, a work that is made use of, and that it be well-pleasing to God, not because of what it is in itself, but because of your faith and your right use of it. The Word of God is also of itself pleasing to God, but it is harmful to me when it does not please God also within me. In short, such expressions as *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* are nothing but useless words of men, more of a hindrance than a help. And who could tell all the abominable abuses and misbeliefs which daily multiply about this blessed sacrament, although some of them are so spiritual and holy that they might almost lead an angel astray? Briefly, whoever would understand the abuses need only keep before him the aforesaid use and faith of this sacrament; namely, that there must be a sorrowing, hungry soul, desiring heartily the love, help, and support of the entire communion of Christ and of all saints, doubting not that in faith it obtains them, and then, on the

³⁸ An *opus operatum*.

³⁹ An *opus operantis*.

other hand, making itself one with everyone. Whoever does not thus direct and order the hearing or reading of masses and the reception of the sacrament, errs and does not use this sacrament to his salvation. For this reason also the world is overwhelmed with pestilences, wars and other horrible plagues⁴⁰, since with our many masses we only call upon us the more disfavor.

21. We see now how necessary this sacrament is for those who must face death, or other dangers of body and soul, since they are not let alone in them, but are strengthened in the communion of Christ and all saints. Therefore also Christ instituted it and gave it to His disciples in their extreme need and danger. Since we are all daily surrounded by all kinds of danger, and must at last die, we should humbly and heartily and with all our powers thank the God of all mercy for giving us a gracious sign, by which, if we hold fast thereto by faith. He leads and draws us through death and every danger to Himself, to Christ, and to all saints.

Therefore it is also profitable and necessary that the love and fellowship of Christ and all saints be hidden, invisible and spiritual, and that only a bodily, visible and outward sign of it be given us. For were this love, fellowship and help known to all, like the temporal fellowship of men, we should not be strengthened nor trained thereby to put our trust in the invisible and eternal things, or to desire them, but should much rather be trained to put our trust only in the temporal, visible things and to become so accustomed to them as to be unwilling to let them go and

⁴⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 11:30.

to follow God onward; we should thus be prevented from ever coming to Him, if we followed God only so far as visible and tangible things led us. For everything of time and sense must fall away, and we must learn to do without them, if we are to come to God.

Therefore the mass and this sacrament are a sign by which we train and accustom ourselves to let go all visible love, help, and comfort, and to trust in Christ and in the invisible love, help, and comfort of His saints. For death takes away everything visible, and separates us from men and temporal things; hence, to meet death, we must have the help of the invisible and eternal things; and these are indicated to us in the sacrament and sign, to which we cling by faith, until we attain to them also by sight. Thus the sacrament is for us a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a litter, in which and by which we pass from this world into eternal life. Therefore all depends on faith. He who does not believe is like one who must cross the sea, but is so timid that he does not trust the ship; and so he must remain and never be saved, because he does not embark and cross over. This is due to our dependence on the senses and to our untried faith which shrinks from the passage across the Jordan of death—the devil also cruelly helps toward this.

22. This was indicated of old in Joshua iii [Josh. 3:7 ff.]. After the children of Israel had gone dry-shod through the Red Sea, a type of baptism, they went through Jordan in like manner; but the priests stood with the ark in Jordan, and the water below them

lowed by, while that above them stood upon a heap, a type of this sacrament. The priests carry and uphold the ark in Jordan when in the hour of our death or peril they preach and administer to us this sacrament, Christ, and the fellowship of all saints. I we believe, the waters below us depart, that is, the temporal, visible things harm us not, but flee from us. And those above us stand up high, as though they would overwhelm us; these are the horrors and apparitions of the other world, which at the hour of death terrify us. If, however, we pay no heed to them, and pass on with a firm faith, we shall enter into eternal life dry-shod and unharmed.

We have, therefore, two principal sacraments in the church, baptism and the bread. Baptism leads us into a new life on earth; the bread guides us through death into eternal life. And the two are typified by the Red Sea and the Jordan, and by the two lands, one beyond and one on this side the Jordan. Therefore our Lord said at the Last Supper: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." [Matt. 26:29] So entirely is this sacrament intended and ordained to strengthen us against death, and to give us entrance into eternal life.

Finally, the blessing of this sacrament is fellowship and love, by which we are strengthened against death and all evil. This fellowship is twofold: on the one hand we partake of Christ and all saints, on the other hand we permit all Christians to be partakers of us, in whatever way they and we are able; so that by this sacrament all self-seeking love is uprooted and gives

place to love which seeks the common good of all, and through this mutual love there is one bread, one drink, one body, one community,—that is the true union of Christian brethren. Now let us see how the pretentious brotherhoods, of which there are now so many, measure up to this and resemble it.

CONCERNING THE BROTHERHOODS. ⁴¹

1. First, let us consider the evil practices of the brotherhoods. One of these is their gluttony and drunkenness,—one or more masses are held⁴², afterward the entire day and night, and other days besides, are given over to the devil, and they do only what displeases God. Such mad reveling has been introduced by the evil spirit, and is called a brotherhood, whereas it is rather a debauch and altogether a heathenish, nay, swinish mode of life. There would far better be no brotherhoods in the world than that such an abomination should be permitted. Temporal lords and cities should unite with the clergy in abolishing it. For God, the saints, and all Christians are greatly dishonored thereby, and the divine services and feast-days made a sport for the devil. Saints' days should be kept and hallowed with good works; and the brotherhood should also be a special treasury of good works; instead it has become a treasury of beer money. What have the

⁴¹ Sodalities; see Introduction, p. 8, and below, pp. 137 f.

⁴² On festival days of the order and on saints' days.

names of Our Lady, of St. Anne, St. Sebastian⁴³, or other saints to do with your brotherhoods, in which you have nothing but gluttony, drunkenness, squandering of money, howling, yelling, chattering, dancing and wasting of time? If a sow were made the patron saint of such a brotherhood she would not consent. Why then do they afflict the dear saints so sorely by taking their names in vain in such shameful practices and sins, and by dishonoring and blaspheming the brotherhoods named after them with such evil practices? Woe unto them who do and permit this!

2. If men desire to maintain a brotherhood, they should gather provisions, and feed and serve a tableful or two of poor people, for the sake of God; the day previous they should fast, and on the feast-day remain sober, and pass the time in prayer and other good works. Then God and His saints would be truly honored; this would lead to better conditions, and a good example would be given others. Or they should gather the money which they intended to squander or drink and form a common treasury, each trade⁴⁴ by itself, so that needy fellow-workmen might be assisted, or be lent money, or a young couple of that trade might be fitted

⁴³ The Carmelites are supposed to have been the first to organize sodalities, having organized in the fourteenth century the Sodality of Our Lady of Carmel. St. Anne was the mother of the Holy Virgin. Her sodalities were, as Kolde says, epidemic in 1520. Luther's appeal to St. Anne in the thunderstorm is well known (Comp. Köstlin-Kawerau, I, 55). There was a sodality of St. Anne, besides one of St. Augustine and one of St. Catherine, in the monastery at Erfurt in Luther's day. St. Sebastian was a martyr of the fourteenth century. His day is January 20. Comp. Arts. *Anna, Sebastian* and *Bruderschaten* in *Prot. Realencyk.*, I, SS2; II, 534 l.

⁴⁴ A trades' guild brotherhood.

out respectably from the common treasury: these would be true works of brotherhood, which would make God and His saints look with pleasure upon the brotherhoods, of which they would then gladly be the patrons. But where they are unwilling to do this, and follow after the old mummery, I admonish that it be not done on the saints' day's, nor in the name of the saints or of the brotherhood. Let them take some other weekday and leave off the names of the saints and of their brotherhoods, lest the saints at some time mark it with disapproval. Although there is no day which is not dishonored by such doings, at least the festivals and the names of the saints should be spared. For such brotherhoods call themselves brotherhoods of the saints while they do the work of the devil.

3. Another evil feature of the brotherhoods is of a spiritual nature; it is a false opinion of themselves, in that they think their brotherhood is to be a benefit to no one but to themselves,—to those who are members and are on the roll or contribute. This damnably wicked opinion is an even worse evil than the first, and is one of the reasons why God has brought it about that the brotherhoods are becoming such a mockery and blasphemy of God through gluttony, drunkenness and the like. For there they learn to seek their own good, to love themselves, to be faithful only to one another, to despise others, to think themselves better than others and presume to stand higher before God than others. And thus perishes the communion of saints, the Christian love, and the true brotherhood, established in the holy sacrament. Thus

a selfish love grows in them; that is, by these many external work-brotherhoods they oppose and destroy the one, inner, spiritual, essential, common brotherhood of all saints.

When God sees this perverted state of affairs, He perverts it still more, as is written in Psalm xviii⁴⁵, "With the perverse thou wilt be perverted" [Ps. 18:26]; and He brings it to pass that they make themselves and their brotherhoods a mockery and a disgrace, and He casts them out from the common brotherhood of saints, which they oppose and do not make common cause with, into their brotherhood of gluttony, drunkenness and unchastity, so that they, who have neither sought nor thought of anything more than their own, may find their own; and then He blinds them that they do not recognize it as an abomination and disgrace, but adorn their unseemliness with the names of saints, as though they were doing right; beyond this He lets some fall into so deep an abyss that they openly boast and say whoever is in their brotherhood cannot be condemned, as though baptism and the sacrament, instituted by God Himself, were of less worth and were less certain than that which they have thought out with their darkened minds. Therefore their God will dishonor and blind those who, with their mad conduct and the swinish practices of their brotherhoods, mock and blaspheme His easts, His name, and His saints, to the injury of the common Christian brotherhood, which flowed from the wounds of Christ.

4. Therefore, for the right understanding and use of the

⁴⁵ Douay Version, based on Vulgate, from which Luther quotes.

brotherhoods, one must learn to distinguish rightly between brotherhoods. The first is the divine, the heavenly, the noblest, which surpasses all others, as gold surpasses copper or lead—the fellowship of all saints, of which we spoke above⁴⁶. In this we are all brothers and sisters, so closely united that a closer relationship cannot be conceived, for here we have one baptism, one Christ, one sacrament, one food, one Gospel, one faith, one Spirit, one spiritual body, and each is a member of the other; no other brotherhood is so close. For natural brothers are, to be sure, brothers of one flesh and blood, of one heritage and home, but they must separate and join themselves to others' blood and heritage⁴⁷. Organized brotherhoods have one roll, one mass, one kind of good works, one festival day, one treasury, and, as things are now, their common beer, common feast and common debauch, but none of these binds men so closely together as to produce one spirit, for that is done by Christ's brotherhood alone.

Since, then, the greater, broader and more embracing Christ's brotherhood is, the better it is, therefore all other brotherhoods should be so conducted as to keep this first and noblest brotherhood constantly before their eyes, to regard it alone as great, and with all their works to seek nothing for themselves, but do them for God's sake, to entreat God that He keep and prosper this Christian fellowship and brotherhood from day to day. Hence, when a brotherhood is formed, they should let it

⁴⁶ See above, p. 10.

⁴⁷ I. e., in marriage.

be seen that its members outstrip other persons in order to do Christianity some special service with their prayers, fastings, alms and good works, and not in order to seek selfish profit or reward, nor to exclude others, but to serve as the free servants of the whole community of Christians.

If men had such a correct conception, God would restore good order, so that the brotherhoods might not be brought to shame by debauchery. Then God's blessing would follow, so that a general fund might be gathered, with which other men also might be given material aid; then the spiritual and bodily works of the brotherhoods would be done in their proper order. Whoever will not follow this method in his brotherhood I advise to flee from it and let the brotherhood alone; it will do him harm in body and soul.

But if you say, If the brotherhood is not to give me some special advantage, of what use is it to me? I answer: If you are seeking some special advantage, how can the brotherhood or sisterhood help you? Serve the community and other men by it, as is the nature of love, and you will have your reward for this love without any effort and desire on your part. But if you deem the service and reward of love too small, it is evidence that yours is a perverted brotherhood. Love serves freely and for nothing, therefore God also gives again to it every blessing freely and or nothing. Since, then, everything must be done in love, if it is to please God at all, the brotherhood must also be a brotherhood in love. It is the nature, however, of that which is done in love not

to seek its own, nor its own profit, but that of others, and, above all, that of the community.

5. *To return once more to the sacrament; since the Christian fellowship also is at present in a bad way, as never before, and daily grows worse, especially among the rulers, and all places are full of sin and shame, you should not consider how many masses are said, or how often the sacrament is celebrated, or this will make things worse rather than better,—but how much you and others increase in that which the sacrament signifies and in the faith it demands,—for therein alone lies improvement; and the more you find yourself being incorporated into Christ and into the fellowship of His saints, the better it is with you,—that is, if you find that you are becoming strong in the confidence of Christ and of His dear saints, and are certain that they love you and stand by you in all the trials of life and in death, and that you in turn take to heart the shortcomings and lapses of all Christians and of the whole Church, that your love goes out to everyone, and that you desire to help everyone, to hate no one, to suffer with all and pray for them: then will the work of the sacrament proceed aright, then you will often weep, lament and mourn over the wretched condition of Christendom to-day. If, however, you find no such confidence in Christ and His saints, and the needs of the Church and of every fellowman do not trouble or move you, then beware of all other good works, if in doing them you think you are godly and will be saved. Be assured they are only hypocrisy, sham and deceit, or they are without love and fellowship, and without these nothing is*

good. For the sum of it all is, Plenitudo legis est dilectio, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." [Rom. 13:10] Amen.

**A TREATISE
CONCERNING THE BAN**

1520

INTRODUCTION

The ban, or excommunication, is the correlative of communion. Our conception of excommunication depends then, of course, upon our view of what constitutes communion. Luther gives us his view of communion in the preceding *Treatise concerning the Blessed Sacrament*. From the premise there laid down it follows that excommunication, or the ban, excludes only from external membership in the Church, but cannot really separate a man from the Church if he is in personal fellowship with his Lord⁴⁸. Sin and unbelief cause this separation from Him, and the real ban, therefore, is put into effect not by the Church, but by the man himself when he sins against God. The ban of the Church cannot even deprive one of the Sacrament, but only of the outward use of it, for it can still be partaken of spiritually. This whole position, of course, is fatal to the Roman Catholic conception of the Church, and we do not wonder that it was vigorously opposed by the hierarchy.

Of like significance is Luther's advocacy of the separation of the temporal and spiritual powers, practically of Church and State,—the position which he develops later in the *Open Letter to the Nobility*. But in this treatise, again, Luther shows himself to be anything but the immoral monster his vilifiers have tried to make of him. He is again the man of conscience—will his

⁴⁸ See below, p. 37.

critics say, "of oversensitive conscience"? Thank God that there were some sensitive consciences in an almost conscienceless age! Luther fears sin more than the ban, and sin has for him more than an ecclesiastical meaning. Sin is not primarily an act against the Church, but an offence against God. This the ban is to teach; it is to be the symbol of God's wrath against sin and it is to be used by the Church only remedially and in love. When so used it becomes the chastening rod of the dear Mother Church, provided it be accepted and borne in this spirit.

Why, then, did not Luther bear his own ban in this way? The justification for his subsequent conduct is to be found in two brief but important conditional clauses in this treatise. "God," he says, "cannot and will not permit authority to be wantonly and impudently resisted, *when it does not force us to do what is against God or His commandments.*"⁴⁹ Again he says, "When unjustly put under the ban we should be very careful not to do, omit, say or withhold that on account of which we are under the ban, *unless we cannot do so without sin and without injury to our neighbor.*"⁵⁰ God and his neighbor were for Luther the actors which made it necessary for him to speak and act, when for selfish reasons he would often rather have remained passive.

The inception of our treatise is to be found in a sermon preached in Wittenberg in the spring of 1518. Luther's pastoral concern for his people made it necessary for him to speak on

⁴⁹ See below, p. 50.

⁵⁰ See below, p. 51.

this subject in order to quiet the consciences both embittered and distressed by the wanton and unjust use of the power of excommunication. Added to this must have been his own personal interest in the ban certain to fall on him. In a letter to Link⁵¹, dated July 10, 1518, he speaks of having preached a sermon on the power of the ban which produced general consternation and fear that the ire enkindled by the XCV Theses would start afresh. He had desired a public disputation on the subject, but the Bishop of Brandenburg persuaded him to defer the matter. Under date of September 1st, Luther writes Staupitz⁵² that because his sermon had been misrepresented and spread by unfriendly spies it became necessary for him to publish it. It appeared in August after Luther's summons to Rome, under the title *De Virtute Excommunicationis*. Our treatise is an elaboration in popular form of this Latin treatise of 1515.

The Grünberg text given in Clemen, Vol. I, which we have followed in most cases, is dated 1520, and must have appeared in its original edition at the end of 1519 or the beginning of 1520.

The text of the treatise is found in the following editions: Weimar Ed., vol. vi, 63; Erlangen Ed., vol. xxvii, 51; Walch Ed., vol. xix, 1089; St. Louis Ed., vol. .xix, 884; Clemen, vol. i, 213; Berlin Ed., vol. iii, 291.

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⁵¹ See Enders, I, No. 84. Smith, *Luther's Correspondence*, I, No. 69.

⁵² See Enders, I, No. 90. Smith, *Luther's Correspondence*, I, No. 77.

A TREATISE CONCERNING THE BAN

1520

JESUS

1. *We have seen⁵³ that the sacrament of the holy body of Christ is a sign of the communion of all saints, therefore it becomes necessary to know also what the ban is which is employed in the Church by the power of the spiritual estate. For its chief and peculiar function and power is to deprive guilty Christians of the holy sacrament and forbid it to them. Therefore the one cannot be understood apart from the other, because the one is the opposite of the other; for the Latin word *communio* means fellowship, and thus do the learned designate the Holy Sacrament. Its opposite is the word *excommunicatio*, which means exclusion from this fellowship, and so the learned term the ban.*

2. There is a twofold fellowship, corresponding to the two things in the sacrament, the sign and the thing signified, as was

⁵³ In the preceding treatise on the *Blessed Sacrament*.

said in the treatise⁵⁴. The first is an inner, spiritual and invisible fellowship of the heart, by which one is incorporated by true faith, hope and love in the fellowship of Christ and of all the saints, signified and bestowed in the sacrament; and this is the effect and virtue of the sacrament. This fellowship can neither be given nor taken away by any one, be he bishop, pope, or angel or any creature. God alone through His Holy Spirit must pour it into the heart of the one who believes in the sacrament, as was said in the treatise⁵⁵. This fellowship no ban can touch or affect, but only the unbelief or sin of the person himself; by these he can excommunicate himself, and thus separate himself from the grace, the and salvation of the fellowship. This St. Paul proves in Romans viii: "Who shall separate us from the God? Can anguish or need, or hunger or poverty, or danger or persecution, or shedding of blood? Nay, I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities nor angelic hosts, neither things present nor things to come, naught that is mighty on the earth, neither height nor depth nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord." [Rom. 8:35, 38] And St. Peter says: "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" [1 Peter 3:13]

3. The second kind of fellowship is an outward, bodily and visible fellowship, by which one is admitted to the Holy

⁵⁴ See above, p. 10.

⁵⁵ See above, p. 18.

Sacrament and receives and partakes of it together with others. From this fellowship or communion bishop and pope can exclude one, and forbid it to him on account of his sin, and that is called putting him under the ban. This ban was much in vogue of old, and is now known as the lesser ban. For the ban goes beyond this and forbids even burial, selling, trading, all association and fellowship with men, finally, as they say, even fire and water⁵⁶, and this is known as the greater ban.

Not satisfied with this, there are some who go still farther and use the temporal powers against those under the ban, to coerce them with sword, fire, and war⁵⁷. These, however, are new inventions, rather than the real meaning of Scripture. To wield the temporal sword belongs to the emperor, to kings, to princes, and to the rulers of this world, and by no means to the spiritual estate⁵⁸, whose sword is not to be of iron, but the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word and commandment of God, as St. Paul says. [Eph. 6:17]

4. This external ban, both the lesser and the greater, was instituted by Christ when He said in Matthew xviii: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast

⁵⁶ I. e., the necessaries of life.

⁵⁷ E. g., the crusades against heretics, and the inquisition of the thirteenth century. Luther's statement that to burn heretics is contrary to the will of the Holy Spirit was condemned in the Bull *Exsurge Domine*, of July 15, 1520.

⁵⁸ Cf. p. 53.

gained thy brother. If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word or transaction may be established. If he will not hear them, then tell it unto the whole congregation, the Church. If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee a heathen man and a publican." [Matt. 18:15 ff.]

Likewise St. Paul says in I Corinthians v: "If any man among you be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one keep not company, neither eat with him." [1. Cor. 5:11] Again he says in II Thessalonians iii: "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." [2 Thess. 3:14] Again, John says in his second Epistle: "If any one come unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed, and he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." [2 John 10]

From all these sayings we learn how the ban is to be used. First, we should seek neither vengeance nor our own profit, as is at present the disgraceful practice everywhere, but only the correction of our neighbor. Second, the penalty should stop short of his death or destruction; or St. Paul limits the purpose of the ban to the correction of our neighbor, that he be put to shame when no one associates with him, and he adds in 11 Thessalonians iii: "Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." [2 Thess. 3:15] But now the ruthless tyrants deal with men as though they would cast them down to hell, and

do not in any wise seek their correction.

5. It may often happen that a person under the ban is deprived of the holy sacrament, and also of burial, and is nevertheless inwardly⁵⁹ secure and blessed in the fellowship of Christ and of all saints, signified in the sacrament. On the other hand, there are many who are not under the outward ban and who freely partake of the sacrament, but are nevertheless inwardly quite estranged and excommunicated from the fellowship of Christ; even though they be buried under the high altar in a golden pall with much pomp and singing and tolling of bells. Therefore, no one is to be judged, even if he be under the ban, especially if he has not been put under the ban for heresy or sin, but for the purpose of correction. For to put men under the ban for the sake of money or other temporal considerations is a new invention, of which the apostles and Christ knew nothing.

6. To put under the ban is not, as some think, to deliver a soul to Satan and deprive it of the intercession and of all the good works⁶⁰ of the Church. For where the true faith and love of God remain in the heart, there remains a real participation in all the possessions and intercessions of the Church, together with all the benefits of the sacrament, since the ban is and can be nothing else than exclusion from the external sacrament or from association with men. If I were cast into prison I would, of course, be deprived of the outward companionship of my friends,

⁵⁹ Cf. p. 10.

⁶⁰ See Vol. I, pp. 53, 163 ff.

and yet not be deprived of their favor and friendship; so he that is put under the ban must relinquish the sacrament and association with men, but is not on that account cut off from their love, intercession and good works.

7. It is true that the ban, when it is rightly and deservedly applied, is a sign, an admonition and a chastisement, whereby the one under the ban should recognize that he himself has delivered his soul unto Satan by his transgression and sin, and has deprived himself of the fellowship of all the saints and of Christ. For by the penalty of the ban our mother, the holy Church, would show her dear son the awful consequences of sin and thereby bring him back from the devil to God. When an earthly mother rebukes and chastises her erring son, she does not give him over to the hangman or to the wolves, nor make a knave of him, but she restrains him and shows him by her chastisement that he is in danger of the hangman, and thus keeps him at home in his father's house. In the same way, when the spiritual power puts any one under the ban, it should be in this spirit: "Behold, thou has done this or that, whereby thou hast delivered thy soul unto the devil, deserved God's wrath, and deprived thyself of all Christian fellowship; thou art fallen under the inward spiritual ban in the sight of God and art unwilling to cease or to return. So then, I put thee also outwardly under the ban in the sight of men, and to thy shame I deprive thee of the sacrament and of fellowship with men, until thou come to thyself and bring back thy soul."

8. Let every bishop, provost or official⁶¹, who uses the ban for any other purpose, take heed lest he put himself under the everlasting ban from which neither God nor any creature shall deliver him. There are none to whom the ban is more harmful and dangerous than those who apply it, even though it be laid quite justly and only on account of wrongdoing, for the reason that they seldom if ever have this object in view. Besides they go about it without fear and do not consider how perchance they themselves may be more worthy of a hundred bans in the sight of God, as the Gospel records of the servant who owed his Lord ten thousand pounds and yet would not have patience with his fellow servant who owed him a hundred pence. What will become of these miserable taskmasters, who for the sake of money have brought things to such a pass with their bans, often violently and unjustly imposed, that Turks and heathen have an easier life than Christians? It is very evident that many of them are under the ban in the sight of God, and are deprived of the blessing of the sacrament and of inward, spiritual fellowship, although they do nothing day and night but cite others to appear, harass them and put them under the ban, and deprive of the external sacrament those who are a thousandfold better inwardly and in the sight of God and are living in the spiritual fellowship of the sacrament. O miserable business! O terrible existence maintained by this abominable trade! I am not sure whether such publicans and officials were wolves before becoming officials or

⁶¹ The officials were officers of the bishops' courts; see also below, p. 103.

whether they are on the way to becoming wolves; their work is certainly wolves' work.

9. From this there follows the truth that the ban of itself ruins, condemns or harms no one, but seeks and finds the ruined and condemned soul for the purpose of bringing it back. For all chastisement is for the correction of sin; the ban is simply a chastisement and motherly correction; therefore it makes no one worse or more sinful, but is ordained solely to restore the inward spiritual fellowship when justly laid, or to deepen it when unjustly imposed. This is proved by St. Paul when he says in II Corinthians xiii: This I write to you according to the power which the Lord hath given me, to edification and not to destruction," [2 Cor. 13:10] And thus, when he rebukes him who had taken his step-mother to wife, he says in I Corinthians v: "I together with you deliver him unto the devil for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved at the last day." [1 Cor. 5:5] Thus also in the passage quoted above he said: "We should not count him who is under the ban as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother, in order that he may be put to shame and not be lost." [2 Thess. 3:15] Nay, even Christ Himself, as man, had not the power to cut off and deliver a single soul to the devil, as He says in John vi: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out, and this is the will of My Father Who sent Me, that I should not destroy or lose what He giveth Me." [John 6:37, 39] Again He says: "The Son of Man is not come to destroy, but to save men's souls." [Luke 9:56] If Christ Himself and all the apostles had no other power

than to help souls, and have let behind them no other power in the Church, how dare the blind tyrants presume and boast in their presumption that they have power to curse, to condemn and to destroy, which power is even denied them by their own canon law; for in the Liber Sextus⁶², which treats of the sentence of excommunication, we read: "Since the ban is a medicine and not a poison, only a discipline, not a destructive uprooting, in so far as the one subjected to it does not despise it: therefore let every spiritual judge give diligence to prove himself one who seeks by the ban naught but to correct and to cure."

10. From the above passage it is evident that the ban, when it is not despised, is wholesome and harmless, and not fatal to the soul, as certain timid and dejected consciences, frightened by the outrageous abuses of some, imagine; although in apostolic times it was able to deliver the body to the devil and to death⁶³, as indeed it might still be, if the judges would wield the ban, not in the abuse of power, but in humble faith and love, for the correction of their neighbor. It follows further that the ban brings greater danger and terror to those who apply it and are not careful to seek only the correction and salvation of those under the ban, according to the words of the above passage⁶⁴. For the ban can be nothing else than a kind, motherly scourge applied to the body and temporal possessions, by which no one is cast into

⁶² In Vito, lib. V, tit. xi, c. I, *Cum medicinalis*.

⁶³ According to Luther's interpretation of 1 Cor. 5:5. Cf. also Acts 5:5.

⁶⁴ The passage quoted from the canon law.

hell, but rather drawn out of it, and freed from condemnation unto salvation. Therefore we should not only endure it without impatience, but receive it with all joy and reverence. But for the tyrants, who seek therein nothing else than power, awe and gain for themselves, the ban must be a terrible injury, because they pervert it and its purpose, turn the medicine into a poison, and seek only to become a terror to a frightened people; of correction they never think. For this they will have to give an awful reckoning—woe unto them!

11. They have devised a saying, to wit: "Our ban must be feared, right or wrong." With this saying they insolently comfort themselves, swell their chests and puff themselves up like adders, and almost dare to defy heaven and to threaten the whole world; with this bugaboo they have made a deep and mighty impression, imagining that there is more in these words than there really is. Therefore we would explain them more fully and prick this bladder, which with its three peas makes such a rightful noise.

Now, it is true, the ban must be feared and not be despised, whether it be just or unjust. But why apply this only to the ban, which is a motherly chastening, and not to all the other and greater penalties and tribulations as well? For what great thing have you done or the ban by saying it must be feared? Must we not also fear when we are sick, poor, slandered, despised, or deprived of goods, income or justice, nay, when the Turk and other enemies attack or afflict us? For all these and other adversities, whether deserved or undeserved, we should fear,

suffer and endure, and in all things conduct ourselves as though we but received our deserts, as the Lord teaches: "O him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again." [Luke 6:30] Why are you not also afraid, dear tyrant, when you suffer injustice, when your income is refused, your property stolen, your rights denied, and why do you not think that you should endure these things in fear, whether they be right or wrong? Do you think that others are commanded to endure your power in ear, whether right or wrong, and that you are free from this commandment and need not endure violence or wrong in fear? You will learn that you also are human and under the same law with which you threaten others, puffing yourself up in your folly.

12. What perversity! The spiritual powers come along with their ban and say it should be eared and endured, whether right or wrong. But if they are subjected to violence and injustice they will not endure it to the extent of a single heller, but without any fear at all, cast up the accounts in their favor and demand what is theirs. Thus they withdraw themselves from God's commandment, in keeping which they, most of all, should be an example to others. For if it is true that pope, bishop and the whole spiritual estate may without fear resist injustice, injury and contempt in their own interest, then it is also true that the ban may be resisted and be repelled, as vigorously as they seek their interest. There is no distinction in God's commandment, it concerns every one alike. But may God forbid that! We are to bear both the ban and whatever tribulation may befall us in

fear, as the Gospel teaches. Therefore, if any one wrong you or take your income, and you do not endure it in fear, but would frighten him with the ban⁶⁵, especially when you are seeking not his improvement, but your own benefit or self-will, take heed, you are already worse than he. For you intend to draw yourself out of fear and to draw him in, which you have no right to do, and compel him to keep the Gospel which you tear to pieces. How will you be able to stand before God? Therefore when they say, "Our ban must be feared, right or wrong," we reply: "Yes, that is true, but it is also true that your unjust ban harms no one but yourselves, and harms you in body and soul. And the just ban harms you more than it harms me. Therefore you should also endure your injury in fear, be it right or wrong, and if you glory over me because of the ban I will glory over you because of your suffering. If a criminal took my coat and said: 'You should endure it in fear and humility,' I would say, 'I will; not for the sake of your theft, which harms me not, but for the sake of Christ's commandment [Matt. 5:40].' Just so I fear your ban, not for the ban's sake (it does not harm me, but rather yourself), but for the sake of Christ's commandment."

13. Though it is true that the ban must be feared, whether it be right or wrong, yet those who lay the ban are always in greater danger than those on whom it is laid. He who is banned is in no danger but that of despising the ban and not bearing it,

⁶⁵ For instances see the *Gravamina of the German Nation* (1521), Wrede, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten*, II, 685.

whether it be right or wrong. But he who bans is in danger, in the first place, of not enduring injustice in fear; in the second place, of avenging himself through the ban without any fear; in the third place, of not seeking, with singleness of purpose, his sinful neighbor's correction by means of the ban. This is evident because he despises his own sin and that of others, and only attacks the man who injures him, all of which is contrary to the Gospel. Hence it comes that by means of their dreadful perverseness those who use the ban nowadays pick up the spoon and tread in the dish⁶⁶; they put others under the external ban and put themselves under condemnation inwardly; in addition, they become so blinded that they boast how greatly their external ban is to be feared, and inwardly they condemn themselves, and rejoice boldly and without fear like fools and madmen. For this reason I am sure that the Holy Spirit did not invent the saying, Our ban must be feared, right or wrong. It does not become a Christian, not to say one in the spiritual estate⁶⁷, to wrong another, much less to lord it over him and boast that this injustice must be feared. It behooves me to say, Thy injustice makes me tremble; it behooves thee much more to take heed and be in fear lest thou do me wrong and threaten me besides, saying that I must endure it in fear; or thy injustice can harm me only in time, but thee it harms to all eternity. So evil and lamentable are these present times, in which such furious tyrants shamelessly

⁶⁶ Thiele, *Luthers Sprichwörterammlung*, No. 276.

⁶⁷ I. e., a cleric.

and openly boast of their sin and everlasting hurt (which would be horrible even in Turks and heathen), in order that they may be defiant now and mock at the misfortunes of those who suffer, whom they do not seek to correct, but only to inspire with fear and false terror.

In a word, the higher estate is always, with all its works, in greater danger than the lower estate, and where the lower estate must needs be in fear once, there the higher estate needs be in fear ten times over. On this account those who exercise the ban have no reason to lord it over those who are under the ban or to deal arrogantly with them, but all the more reason to weep or themselves. For God's judgment will not be pronounced on the lowly, but on the mighty, as Wisdom the wise man says [Wisdom 6:8 f.].

14. It were indeed better if Christians were taught to love the ban rather than to fear it⁶⁸, as we are taught by Christ to love chastisement, pain and even death, and not to fear them. But these prattlers speak only of fear in the ban, though they teach that all other chastisements and misfortunes are to be borne cheerfully. Whereby they betray their blind and cursed purpose, which is to rule by force over the people of Christ, and as it were to take the free Christian Church captive in fear. Therefore let us learn what is our chief duty with respect to the ban, namely, not to despise it or bear it impatiently, and this for two reasons. First, because the authority of the ban was given by Christ to

⁶⁸ This statement also was condemned in the papal bull.

the holy mother, the Christian Church, that is, to the community of all Christians. Therefore, in this matter we should honor and submit to our dear mother Church and to Christ. For what Christ and the Church do should have our approval, our love and our filial fear. Secondly, because the effect and purpose of the ban is beneficial and salutary and never injurious, if one endures it and does not despise it. To use a homely illustration: When a mother punishes her beloved son, whether he has deserved it or not, she certainly does not do it with evil intent, but it is a maternal, harmless and salutary punishment, if the son bears it patiently. Only when he becomes impatient, and is not influenced by it to leave the wrong or to do the good for the sake of which he is punished, but turns against his mother and despises her, does the punishment begin to do him harm; or then he offends against God, Who has commanded: "Thou shalt honor thy father and mother" [Ex. 20:12]; and out of a light, harmless, yea even beneficial chastisement he makes a terrible wrong and sin, to his everlasting pain and punishment.

15. Thus it happens in our day that certain officials⁶⁹ and their associates are murdered, beaten and bound, or are in constant fear of death. Doubtless this would not occur at all, or at least much less frequently, if the people did not hold the wrong opinion that the ban is more harmful than profitable. For this reason they venture everything, and commit such crimes as it were in despair. Although this is terrible, yet by God's

⁶⁹ The "officials" were the administrators of this discipline, see above, p. 41.

dispensation the tyrants get what they deserve, because they conceal the real benefit of the ban from the people, and misuse it, making no effort toward correction, but aiming simply to increase their own power. For although every one ought to endure the ban, they too ought not to despise a poor human being, be he guilty or innocent, as Christ says: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones that believe on Me, for I say unto you that their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven." [Matt. 18:10] Why should they wonder if, in the providence of God, at times their heads are broken and their commands despised, because of the unjust tyrannical ban, since without ceasing they act so insolently against God's commandment? True, there is great wrong on both sides. Yet if the people were taught that the power of the ban is wholesome and necessary and that it is not ordained nor used to their hurt, but to their benefit, the officials would be in less danger, and find greater and readier obedience, nay, greater love, good will and honor among all the people.

16. Therefore the people should be taught in some such way as this: My dear people, let not those who have and use the power of the ban drive you to despair, whether they be pious or evil, whether they do you justice or injustice. The power of the ban cannot harm you, but must always be beneficial to the soul, if only you bear and endure it aright; their abuse of the ban does not hinder its virtue. Or if you cannot endure it, then try to escape from it with meekness, not with revenge and retaliation

by word or deed. And in all things look not to them, but to the dear mother Church. What difference does it make to you whether she lays her rods of chastisement upon you through pious or through wicked rulers? It is and remains, nevertheless, your dearest mother's most salutary rod. From the beginning of the world it has been so, and will ever remain, that spiritual and temporal power is more often given to the Pilates, Herods, Annases and Caiaphases than to the pious Peters, Pauls and the like, and as in all other estates so in that of government there are always more of the wicked than of the pious. It is not to be supposed or hoped that we shall ever have an entirely pious government, nay, it must come as a pure gift of grace or by special prayer and merit, if good government or a right use of power is to be had at all. For God punishes wicked subjects by wicked rulers, as He says: "I will give children to be their prelates and their rulers shall be childish men, I will take from them every mighty man, the wise, the prudent and the man of war," [Isa. 3:4] etc. Since, then, incapable or evil rulers are God's chastisement, and there are so many among us who deserve such chastisement, we must not be surprised if the government wrongs us and abuses its power toward us, nay, we must wonder and thank God when it does not wrong us and do us injustice.

17. Wherefore, since the world is at present overburdened, as it has abundantly deserved to be because of its heinous sins, with young, imprudent and inexperienced rulers, especially in the spiritual estate, so that this age of ours is extraordinarily perilous,

we must act very prudently and by all means see to it that we hold the government and all authority in the highest honor, even as Christ honors the authority of Pilate, Herod, Annas, Caiaphas, and of the temporal rulers of His time we must not permit such grievous abuses and the childish rule of the prelates to move us to despise all authority, so that despite those unworthy persons who bear rule we may not at the same time despise their authority, but cheerfully bear what it imposes, or reuse to bear it at least with humility and proper respect. For God cannot and will not permit authority to be wantonly and impudently resisted when it does not force us to do what is against God or His commandments⁷⁰, though they themselves do as much as they can against God, or injure us as much as they will. There are some whom He Himself would judge and condemn, and such are those great and powerful tyrants; so too, there are those whom He would help, and such are the oppressed sufferers. Therefore we should yield to this His will and leave the mighty to His sword and judgment, and allow Him to help us, as St. Paul says: "O dearly beloved brethren, neither avenge nor defend yourselves, but rather give place unto the wrath of God, because it is written. Vengeance belongs to Me alone and I will repay each one [Deut. 32:35]." [Rom. 12:19]

And yet we should humbly tell these prelates (especially should the preachers rebuke them, yet only by showing them from the Word of God) that they are acting against God and show them what He would have them do, and in addition diligently and

⁷⁰ A very important limitation for Luther's position.

earnestly pray to God or them; even as Jeremiah wrote to the children of Israel in Babylon that they should zealously pray or the king of Babylon, or his son and for his kingdom, although he had taken them captive, had troubled and slain them and done them all manner of evil.

And we can easily do this if we remember that the ban and all unrighteous authority cannot harm our souls, provided we submit to them, and they must ever be of profit, unless they are despised. So also are the authorities a thousandfold worse in the sight of God than we, and are therefore to be pitied rather than wickedly to be despised. For this reason we are also commanded in the law of Moses that no one shall revile the rulers, be they good or evil, even though they give great occasion. In short, we must have evil or childish rulers,—if it is not the Turk, then it must needs be the Christians. The world is far too wicked to be worthy of good and pious lords, it must have princes who go to war, levy taxes and shed blood, and it must have spiritual tyrants who impoverish and burden it with bulls and letters⁷¹ and laws. This and other chastisements are rather what it has deserved, and to resist them is nothing else than to resist God's chastisement. As humbly as I conduct myself when God sends me a sickness, so humbly should I conduct myself toward the evil government, which the same God also sends me.

18. When we are justly and deservedly put under the ban our chief concern should be to correct the sins of commission and

⁷¹ See Open Letter to the Nobility, below, p. 98.

omission which caused the ban, since the ban always is imposed on account of sin (which is far worse than the ban itself), and yet here as elsewhere things are perverted, so that we only consider how much the rod hurts and not why we are punished. Where can you find men to-day who are as much in fear of sinning and provoking God as they are in fear of the ban? Thus it happens that we are more in fear of the wholesome chastisement than of the heinous sins. We must let men think and act thus, because the natural man does not see the spiritual harm in sin as he feels the smarts of chastisement; although the fear of the ban has also been exaggerated by the tyrannous methods and threatenings of the spiritual judges who drive the people to fear punishment more than sin.

When, however, we are unjustly put under the ban, we should be very careful that we in no way do, omit, say or withhold that on account of which we are under the ban (unless we cannot do so without sin and without injury to our neighbor)⁷², but rather should we endure the ban in humility, die happily under it, if it cannot be otherwise, and not be terrified, even though we do not receive the sacrament and are buried in unconsecrated ground. The reason is this: Truth and righteousness belong to the inner, spiritual fellowship⁷³ and may not be abandoned under penalty of falling under God's eternal ban. Therefore they dare not be surrendered for the sake of the external fellowship, which

⁷² Again an important limitation.

⁷³ See above, p. 41.

is immeasurably inferior, nor because of the ban. To receive the sacrament and to be buried in consecrated ground are of too little consequence that or their sake truth and righteousness be neglected. And that no one may think this strange I will go further and say that even he who dies under a just ban is not damned, unless indeed he did not repent of his sin or despised the ban. For sorrow and repentance make all things right, even though his body be exhumed or his ashes cast into the water⁷⁴.

19. The unjust ban then is much more to be desired than either the just ban or the external fellowship. It is a very precious merit in the sight of God, and blessed is he who dies under an unjust ban. God will grant him an eternal crown for the truth's sake, on account of which he is under the ban. Then let him sing in the words of Psalm cix, "They have cursed me, but Thou hast blessed me." [Ps. 109:28] Only let us beware of despising the authorities, and humbly declare our innocence; if this does not avail, then we are free and without guilt in the sight of God. For if we are in duty bound by the commandment of Christ to agree with our adversary [Matt. 5:25]; how much more should we agree with the authority of the Christian Church, be it exercised justly or unjustly, by worthy or unworthy rulers.

An obedient child, though it does not deserve the punishment it receives from its mother, suffers no harm from the unjust chastisement, nay, by its very patience it becomes much dearer

⁷⁴ The ashes of Hus were cast into the Rhine (1415), and the body of Wycliff was exhumed and cremated and the ashes cast into the water (1427).

and more pleasing to the mother; how much more do we become lovable in God's sight, if at the hands of evil rulers we endure the unmerited punishment of the Church, as our spiritual mother. For the Church remains our mother because Christ remains Christ, and she is not changed into a step-mother simply because of our evil rulers. Nevertheless, the prelates and bishops and their officials should be temperate and not hastily use the ban, for many bans means nothing else than many laws and commandments, and prescribing many laws is to set many snares for poor souls. And so by numerous ill-advised bans nothing more results than great offence and an occasion or sin, by which the wrath of God is provoked, although the ban was ordained to reconcile Him. And although we are truly bound to obey them, still more are they bound to direct, change and regulate their decree and authority according to our ability and need and for our correction and salvation; for we have shown from St. Paul⁷⁵ that power is given not for destruction but for edification [2 Cor. 13:10].

20. The ban should be applied not only to heretics and schismatics, but to all who are guilty of open sin, as we have shown above from St. Paul, who commands that the railer, extortioner, fornicator and drunkard be put under the ban [1 Cor. 5:11]. But in our day such sinners are let in peace, especially if they are bigwigs; and to the disgrace of this noble form of authority, the ban is used only for the collection of debts of

⁷⁵ See above, p. 42.

money, often so insignificant that the costs amount to more than the original debt. In order to gloss this over they have hit upon a new device, saying they put under the ban not because of debt but because of disobedience, because the summons was not respected; were it not for debt, however, they would forget the disobedience, as we see when many other sins, even their own, escape the ban. A poor man must often be disobedient if he is cited to go so many miles, lose time and money and neglect his trade. It is utter tyranny to summon a man to come such a distance across country to court.

And I commend the temporal princes⁷⁶ who will not permit the ban and the abuses connected with it in their lands and among their people. What are princes and counsellors for if they do not concern themselves with and judge such temporal matters as debts, each in their city and province and among their subjects? The spiritual powers should be concerned with the Word of God, with sin, and with the devil, in order to bring souls to God, and should relinquish temporal cases to the temporal judges, as Paul writes⁷⁷[1 Cor. 6:1]. Indeed, as things are now, it is almost necessary to use the ban in order to drive the people into the Church and not out of it.

21. Whether one be justly or unjustly under the ban, no one

⁷⁶ In 1518 both George and Frederick of Saxony took the position that spiritual jurisdiction should be limited to spiritual matters. Gess, *Akten und Briefe zur Kirchenpolitik Georgs 1*, 44.

⁷⁷ Luther puts a peculiar construction upon this passage.

may exclude him from the Church until the Gospel has been read or the sermon preached⁷⁸. For from the hearing of the Gospel and the sermon no one shall or can exclude or be excluded. The hearing of the Word of God should remain free to every one⁷⁹. Nay, those who are under a just ban ought most of all to hear it, that they may perchance be moved by it to acknowledge their sin and to reform. We read that it was the ancient practice of the Church to dismiss those under the ban after the sermon, and if a whole congregation were under the ban the sermon must be allowed to proceed just as though there were no ban. In addition, even though he who is under the ban may not remain for the mass after the sermon, nor come to the sacrament⁸⁰, nevertheless he should not neglect it, but spiritually come to the sacrament, that is, he should heartily desire it and believe that he can spiritually receive it, as was said in the treatise on the sacrament⁸¹.

⁷⁸ The ancient service was divided into the service of the Word (*missa catechumenorum*) and the celebration of the sacrament (*missa fidelium*); before the second, those under the ban as well as the catechumens were required to withdraw.

⁷⁹ The "great ban" excluded from all services.

⁸⁰ According to Roman Catholic usage there is a distinction between hearing mass and receiving the sacrament.

⁸¹ Compare Treatise Concerning the Blessed Sacrament, above, p. 25.

**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE
CHRISTIAN NOBILITY OF
THE GERMAN NATION
CONCERNING THE REFORM
OF THE CHRISTIAN ESTATE**

1520

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*⁸². In a letter to Spalatin⁸³ 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 month⁸⁴, and the composition of the *Open Letter* had evidently not yet begun. On the 23d Luther sent the manuscript of the *Open Letter* to Amsdorf⁸⁵, 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:

⁸² In this edition, I, 337 ff.

⁸³ Enders, II, 414; Smith, *L.'s Correspondence*, I, No. 266.

⁸⁴ Enders, II, 424.

⁸⁵ See below, p. 62.

"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, nay, 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 heinous 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 let 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 June⁸⁶ Luther had received a copy of Prierias' *Epitome of a Reply to Martin Luther*⁸⁷, 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 thee, as thou hast deserved! We have cared for Babylon, and she is not healed; let us, then, leave her, that she may be the habitation of dragons, spectres and witches, and true to her name of Babel, an everlasting confusion, a new pantheon of wickedness."⁸⁸

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 the completion of the *Open Letter*, Leo X signed the bull of excommunication, though it was not published in Germany until later. Thus the *Open Letter* shows us the mind of Luther in the weeks when the permanent

⁸⁶ See letter of June 7th to John Hess, Enders, II, 411; Smith, I, No. 265.

⁸⁷ Published at Rome 1519; printed with Luther's preface and notes, Weimar Ed., VI, 328ff.; Erl. Ed., op. var. arg., II, 79 ff.

⁸⁸ *Weimar Ed.*, VI, 329.

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 knights⁸⁹, who formed the patriotic party in Germany and are included in the "nobility" to whom the Open Letter is addressed⁹⁰.

The first edition of 4000 copies came off the press of Melchior Lotther in Wittenberg before the 18th of August⁹¹. It is surmised⁹² that the earlier portion⁹³ 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 preparation⁹⁴. This "enlarged and revised edition"⁹⁵ contained three passages not included in the first⁹⁶. 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

⁸⁹ See Enders, II, 415, 443; Smith, Nos. 269, 279, and documents in *St. Louis Ed.*, XV, 1630 ff.

⁹⁰ See Köstlin-Kawerau, *Martin Luther*, I, 308 ff., and *Weimar Ed.*, VI, 381 ff.

⁹¹ See Luther's letters to Lang and Staupitz, who wished to have the publication withheld (Enders, II, 461, 463).

⁹² *Clemen*, I, 362.

⁹³ Below, pp. 65-99.

⁹⁴ See *Weimar Ed.*, VI, 397.

⁹⁵ See title *B*, *ibid.*, 398.

⁹⁶ Printed as an appendix in *Clemen*, I, 421-425.

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 own wrath in the effort 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 was 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* is undoubtedly Luther's greatest work. Its rank outspokenness about the 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,"⁹⁷ 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.*, I, 203-290; *Clemen I*, 363-425. The text of the Berlin Ed._ is modernized and

⁹⁷ So it was called by Johann Lang (Enders, II, 461).

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, 1896). 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; *Schäfer, Luther als Kirchenhistoriker*, Gütersloh, 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 Köstlin-Kawerau I, 315 ff.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CHRISTIAN NOBILITY OF THE GERMAN NATION CONCERNING THE REFORM OF THE CHRISTIAN ESTATE

1520

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 thee, esteemed and
reverend dear sir and friend.

The time to keep silence has passed and the time to speak
is come, as saith Ecclesiastes [Eccl. 3:7]. I have followed out
our intention⁹⁸ 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 God may

⁹⁸ *Unserm furnchmen nach*. See Introduction, p. 57.

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 piece 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 comb⁹⁹. It is a question which one will put the bells on the other¹⁰⁰. I must fulfil the proverb, "Whatever the world does, a monk must be in it, even if he has to be painted in."¹⁰¹ More than once a fool has spoken wisely, and wise men often have been arrant fools, as Paul says, "If any one will be wise, let him become a fool." [1 Cor. 3:18] Moreover since I am not only a fool, but also a sworn doctor of Holy Scripture, I am glad for the chance to fulfil my doctor's

⁹⁹ An ironical comparison of the monks' cowl and tonsure with the headgear of the jester.

¹⁰⁰ i. e., Which one turns out to be the real fool.

¹⁰¹ The proverb ran, *Monachus semper praesens*, "a monk is always there." See Wander, *Deutsches Sprichwörterlexicon*, under Mönch, No. 130.

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 so 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.

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 frowardness 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 help¹⁰², have forced me even now to cry aloud that God may inspire some one with His Spirit to lend this suffering nation a

¹⁰² Evidently a reference to the *Gravamina of the German Nation*; see Gebhardt, *Die Grav. der Deutschen Nation*, Breslau, 1895.

helping hand. Ofttimes the councils¹⁰³ have made some pretence 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 hearts¹⁰⁴; wherefore it is meet 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 in 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 is written in the xxxiii. Psalm, "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." [Ps. 33:16] On this account, I fear, it came to pass of old that the good Emperors Frederick I¹⁰⁵ and II¹⁰⁶, and many other German emperors were shamefully oppressed and

¹⁰³ Councils of the Church, especially those of Constance (1414-18), and of Basel (1431-39).

¹⁰⁴ Charles V. was elected Emperor in 1519, when but twenty years of age. Hutten expresses his "hopes of good" from Charles in *Vadiscus* (Böcking, IV, 156).

¹⁰⁵ Frederick Barbarossa (1152-1100).

¹⁰⁶ Frederick II (1212-1250), grandson of Barbarossa and last of the great Hohenstaufen Emperors. He died under excommunication.

trodden under foot by the popes, although all the world feared them. It may be that they relied on their own might more than on God, and therefore they had to all. In our own times, too, what was it that raised the bloodthirsty Julius II¹⁰⁷ to such heights? Nothing else, I fear, except that France, the Germans and Venice relied upon themselves. The children of Benjamin slew 42,000 Israelites¹⁰⁸ because the latter relied on their own strength.

That it may not so fare with us and our noble young Emperor Charles, we must be sure that in this matter we 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

¹⁰⁷ 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.

¹⁰⁸ Luther's recollection of the figures was faulty.

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

[Sidenote: The Three Walls Described]

The Romanists¹⁰⁹, 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 rods¹¹⁰, that they may go unpunished, and have ensconced themselves within the safe stronghold of these three walls, that they may

¹⁰⁹ The term "Romanist" is applied by Luther to the champions of the extreme form of papal supremacy. C. Vol. I, p. 343 f.

¹¹⁰ i. e., The three rods for the punishment of an evil pope.

practise 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 offence against God not to obey them in all these knavish, crafty deceptions¹¹¹. Now God help us, and give us one of the trumpets with which the walls of Jericho were overthrown [Josh. 6:20], that we may blow down these walls of straw and paper, and may set free the Christian rods or 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.

Against the first wall we will direct our first attack.

[Sidenote: The First Wall—the Spiritual Estate above the Temporal]

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

¹¹¹ *Spuknisse*, literally "ghosts." The gist of the sentence is, "the Romanists have frightened the world with ghost-stories."

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 I Corinthians xii. We are all one body, yet every member has its own work, whereby it serves every other, all because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all alike Christians [1 Cor. 12:12 ff.]; for baptism, Gospel and faith alone make us "spiritual" and a Christian people.

[Sidenote: The Priesthood of Believers]

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 images¹¹², but it never makes a Christian or "spiritual" man. Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter ii, "Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom," [1 Pet. 2:9] and the book of Revelation says, "Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings." [Rev. 5:10] 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

¹¹² *Olegötze*—"an image anointed with holy oil to make it sacred"; in modern German, "a blockhead."

inheritance or 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 baptising, 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 baptise and give absolution¹¹³, 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 law¹¹⁴. It was in the manner aforesaid

¹¹³ 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 or salvation, for "necessity knows no law." Cf. Vol. I, p. 30, note 2.

¹¹⁴ The canon law, called by Luther throughout this treatise and elsewhere, the "spiritual law," is a general name for the decrees of councils ("canons" 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 mediæval 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

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. Augustine¹¹⁵, Ambrose¹¹⁶ and Cyprian¹¹⁷ became bishops.

[Sidenote: The Temporal Rulers, Priests]

[Sidenote: The Priest an Office-holder]

Since, then, the temporal authorities are baptised with 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 of the water of baptism¹¹⁸ can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop and pope, though it is not seemly that every one should exercise the office. Nay, just because we are all in like manner priests, no one must put himself

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 XXII*, and the *Extravagantes communes*. The last pope whose decrees are included is Sixtus IV (died 1484). See *Catholic Encyclop.*, IV, pp. 391 ff.

¹¹⁵ Augustine, the master-theologian of the Ancient Church, bishop of Hippo in Africa from 395-430.

¹¹⁶ Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374-397, had not yet been baptised at the time of his election to the episcopate, which was forced upon him by the unanimous voice of the people of the city.

¹¹⁷ 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.

¹¹⁸ *Was ausz der Tauff krochen ist.*

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; holder 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 *characteres indelebiles*¹¹⁹, 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

¹¹⁹ 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."

"temporals," as they call them, except that of office and work, but not of "estate"; or they are all of the same estate¹²⁰,—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 xii [Rom. 12:4 ff.] and I Corinthians xii [1 Cor. 12:12 ff.], and of St. Peter in I Peter ii [1 Pet. 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 the good [Rom. 13:4]. 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 every one 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

¹²⁰ i. e., They are all Christians, among whom there can be no essential difference.

punish it¹²¹. That is as much as to say that the hand shall lend no 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 evil-doers and to protect them that do well [Rom. 13], 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. For if the mere act 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

¹²¹ 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.

evil and to fulfil what St. Peter has said: "There shall be false teachers among you, and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you." [2 Pet. 2:1 ff.]

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 saith St. Paul to all Christians: "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 evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well." [Rom. 13:1, 4] St. Peter also says: "Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, for so is the will of God." [1 Pet. 2:13, 15] He has also prophesied that such men shall come as will despise the temporal authorities [1 Pet. 2:10]; 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 hurl threats and bans as much as they will.

This is why guilty priests, if they are surrendered to the

temporal law¹²², are first deprived of their priestly dignities, which would not be right unless the temporal sword had previously had authority over them by divine right. 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 and 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,¹²³—why not when a peasant is killed? Whence 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

¹²² 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.

¹²³ 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 Nürnberg (1524). See A. Wrede, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V.*, II, pp. 685 f, III, 665.

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 for all the souls that would thereby be abandoned and led 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."¹²⁴ 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 act 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. [Matt. 18:4]

¹²⁴ 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).

Where sin is, there is no escape from punishment; as St. Gregory¹²⁵ 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 Anti-christ¹²⁶ or a sign that he is close at hand.

[Sidenote: The Second Wall—The Pope the Interpreter of Scripture; Papal Infallibility]

The second wall is still more flimsy and worthless. They wish to be the only Masters of the Holy Scriptures¹²⁷ even though in all their lives they learn nothing from them. They assume for

¹²⁵ Gregory the Great, pope 590-604. The passage is found in Migne, LXXVI, 203; LXXVII, 34.

¹²⁶ 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 Loos, *Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed., p. 649). On Dec. 11, 1518, Luther wrote to Link: "You can see whether my suspicion is correct that at the Roman court the true Antichrist rules of whom St. Paul speaks"; and March 13, 1519, he wrote to Spalatin: "I am not sure but that the pope is Antichrist or his apostle." It was the worldly pretensions of the papacy which suggested the idea both to Wyclif and to Luther. By the year 1520 Luther had come to the definite conclusion that the pope was the "man of sin, sitting in the temple of God," and this opinion he never surrendered.

¹²⁷ According to academic usage, the holder of a Master's degree was authorised to expound the subject named in the degree.

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 faith¹²⁸; and yet they cannot prove a single letter of it. Hence it comes that so many heretical and unchristian, nay, 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 the 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 myself¹²⁹, 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 I Corinthians xiv: anyone something

¹²⁸ 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, "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).

¹²⁹ Most recently in Prierias's *Epitome*. See preceding note.

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." [1 Cor. 14:30] 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? [John 6:45] Christ also says in John vi, 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 defence 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 community¹³⁰. Moreover, the keys were not ordained for doctrine or government, but only for the binding and loosing of sin [John 20:22 ff.], and whatever further power of the keys they arrogate to themselves is mere

¹³⁰ Luther had discussed the whole subject of the power of the keys in a 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).

invention. But Christ's word to Peter, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not," [Luke 22:32] 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 xvii: "Father, I pray for those whom Thou hast given Me, and not for these only, but for all who believe on Me through their word." [John 17:9, 20] 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"; 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 above¹³¹, 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 I Corinthians ii: "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man," [1 Cor. 2:15] and II Corinthians

¹³¹ Pp. 66 ff.

iv: "We have all the same Spirit of faith"? [2 Cor. 4:13] 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 [2 Cor. 3:17], 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 his Sarah, although she was in more complete subjection to him than we are to anyone on earth [Gen. 21:12]. Balaam's ass, also, was wiser than the prophet himself [Num. 22:28]. If God then spoke by 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 [Gal. 2:11 ff.]. Therefore it behooves every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to rebuke all errors.

[Sidenote: The Third Wall—Pope and Council]

The *third wall* falls of itself when the first two are down. For when the pope acts contrary to the Pope and 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 xviii: "If thy brother sin against thee, go and tell it him between thee and him alone; if he hear thee not, then take with thee one or two more; if

he hear them not, tell it to the Church; if he hear not the Church, consider him a heathen." [Matt. 18:15] 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 offence 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 or their contention that it belongs to the pope alone to call a council or confirm its actions¹³²; 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.

Thus we read in Acts xv. that it was not St. Peter who called the Apostolic Council, but the Apostles and elders [Acts 15:6]. If, then, that right had belonged to St. Peter alone, the council would not have been a Christian council, but an heretical *conciliabulum*¹³³. Even the Council of Nicæa—the most famous

¹³² Another contention of Prierias. In 1518 (Nov. 25th) 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).

¹³³ i. e., A mere gathering of people.

of all—was neither called nor confirmed by the Bishop of Rome, but by the Emperor Constantine¹³⁴, and many other emperors after him did the like, yet these councils were the most Christian of all¹³⁵. But if the pope alone had the right to call councils, then all these 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 offence to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a faithful member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council¹³⁶. No one can do this so well as the temporal authorities, especially since now they also are fellow-Christians, fellow-priests, "fellow-spirituals,"¹³⁷ fellow-lords over all things, and whenever it is needful or profitable, they should give free course to the 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 let it burn on and on and consume everything that could burn, for the sole reason

¹³⁴ The Council of Nicæa, 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 _Schäffer, *Luther als Kirchenhistoriker*, pp. 291 ff.; Kohler, *Luther und die Kg.*, pp. 148 ff.

¹³⁵ Luther is here referring to the earlier so-called "ecumenical" councils.

¹³⁶ i. e., A council which will not be subject to the pope. Cf. *Erl. Ed.*, xxvi, 112.

¹³⁷ i. e., They belong to the "spiritual estate"; see above, p. 69.

that nobody had the authority of the burgomaster, or because, perhaps, the fire broke out 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 offence 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, and awakens the Christians, and calls them together?

But all their boasts of an authority which dare not be 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 for 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 to him nor to 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, "God has given us authority not for the destruction, but for the edification of Christendom." [2 Cor. 10:8] Who is ready to overleap this text? It is only the power of the devil and of Antichrist which resists the things that serve

or 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.

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 xxiv: "There shall come in My Name false Christs and false prophets, and do signs and wonders, so as to deceive even the elect," [Matt. 24:24] and Paul says in II Thessalonians ii, that Antichrist shall, through the power of Satan, be mighty in lying wonders [2 Thess. 2:9]. Let us, therefore, hold fast to this: No Christian authority can do anything against Christ; as St. Paul says, "We can do nothing against Christ, but for Christ." [2 Cor. 13:8] Whatever does aught against Christ is the power of Antichrist and of the devil, even though 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 [2 Thess. 2:9 f.]. 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 laity¹³⁸ 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 [Acts 5:29], 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.

[Sidenote: Worldliness of the pope]

1. It is a horrible and frightful thing that the ruler of

¹³⁸ *Der Haufe*, i. e. Christians considered *en masse*, without regard to official position in the Church.

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 crown¹³⁹; 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 offence, and the pope is bound on his soul's salvation to lay it aside, because St. Paul says, "Abstain from all outward shows, which give offence," [1 Thess. 5:21] and in Rom. xii, "We should provide good, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men." [Rom. 12:17] 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

¹³⁹ 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 the rulers of this world, of which Luther here complains. See *Realencyk.*, X, 532, and literature there cited.

world; that is a lie; for Christ, Whose vicar and officer he boasts himself to be, said before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," [John 17:36] 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, "I was willing to know nothing among you save Christ, and Him only as the Crucified" [1 Cor. 2:2]; and in Philipians ii, "So think of yourselves as ye see in Christ, Who emptied Himself and took upon Him the appearance of a servant" [Phil. 2:5]; and again in I Corinthians i, "We preach Christ, the Crucified." [1 Cor. 1:23] 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 them¹⁴⁰. These are indeed the very works of the very Antichrist.

[Sidenote: The Cardinals]

2. 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 prelacies, and so overthrowing the worship of God. For this reason we now see Italy a very wilderness—monasteries in ruins, bishoprics devoured, the prelacies and the revenues of all the

¹⁴⁰ A statement made by Augustinus Triumphus. See above, p. 73, note 5; and below, p. 246.

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 income¹⁴¹. No Turk could have so devastated Italy and suppressed the worship of God.

Now that Italy is sucked dry, they come into Germany¹⁴², and begin oh, so gently. But let us beware, for 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 [Dan. 11:39, 43]. So it goes on. They skim the cream of 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 practise for the present the sacred trickery of coupling together ten or twenty prelacies and taking a yearly portion from each of them, so as to make a tidy sum after all. The priory of Würzburg yields a thousand *gulden*; that of Bamberg, something; Mainz, Trier and the others, something more; and so from one to ten thousand

¹⁴¹ 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 practised by the cardinals. Cf. Lea, in *Cambridge Mod. Hist.*, I, pp. 650 f.

¹⁴² The complaint that the cardinals were provided with incomes by appointment to German benefices goes back to the Council of Constance (1415). C. Benrath, p. 87, note 17.

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 day¹⁴³, and give to one Mount St. Michael at Bamberg¹⁴⁴ and the bishopric of Würzburg 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 year¹⁴⁵. 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 it¹⁴⁶, 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

¹⁴³ 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. C. Hutten's *Vadiscus* (Bocking IV, 188).

¹⁴⁴ The famous Benedictine monastery just outside the city of Bamberg.

¹⁴⁵ The proposal made at Constance (see above, p. 82, note 2) was more generous. It suggested a salary of three to four thousand gulden.

¹⁴⁶ 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.

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

[Sidenote: The Curia]

3. If ninety-nine parts of the papal court¹⁴⁷ 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 pope at Rome than it gave in former times to the emperors. Indeed,

¹⁴⁷ 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 offices in recent years has added greatly to the financial burdens of the German Church (Wrede, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V*, II, 675).

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!

[Sidenote: The Annates]

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 benefice¹⁴⁸. This permission was given, however, in order

¹⁴⁸ On the annates, see Vol. I, p. 383, note 1. 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 Church offices which fell vacant, and the complaint of extortion in their appraisal and collection was frequently raised. The Council of Constance

that by means of these large sums of money, the pope might accumulate a treasure for fighting against the Turks and infidels in defence 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 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.

[Sidenote: Saracen-tax]

When they pretend that they are about to fight against the Turks, they send out emissaries to gather money. Ofttimes they

restricted the obligation to bishoprics and abbeys, and such other benefices as had a yearly income of more than 24 gulden. The Council of Basel (1430) 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 has materially increased (A. Wrede, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten 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 Nürnberg (Wrede, *op. cit.*, III, 660). Hutten calls the annates "a good at robbery" (*Ed. Böcking*, IV, 207). In England the annates were abolished by Act of Parliament (April 10, 1532)

issue an indulgence on this same pretext of fighting the Turks¹⁴⁹, 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 again¹⁵⁰. 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, or he is

¹⁴⁹ On the crusading-indulgences, see Vol. I, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ i. e., As was done by the Council of Basel. See above, p. 84, note i.

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 or it than the pope; for the German nation has people enough or the fighting, if only the money is forthcoming. It is with the annates as it has been with many another Roman pretence.

[Sidenote: Papal Months]

Again, the year has been so divided between the pope and the ruling bishops and canons¹⁵¹, that the pope has six months in the year—every other month—in which to bestow the benefices which all vacant in his months¹⁵². In this way almost all the

¹⁵¹ 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.

¹⁵² 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

benefices are absorbed by Rome, especially the very best livings and dignities¹⁵³, 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 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 coronation¹⁵⁴ 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

cathedrals and the chief posts in the monasteries, which all vacant in the months of February, April, June, August, October and December, shall be filled by the ordinary method—election, presentation, appointment by the bishop, etc.—but that vacancies occurring in the other months shall be filled by appointment of the pope.

¹⁵³ 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.

¹⁵⁴ Charles V, though elected emperor, was not crowned until October 22d.

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 all to Rome in three ways:

First, If any one who holds a free¹⁵⁵ living dies at Rome or on the way to Rome, his living must forever belong to the Roman—I should rather say the robbing—See¹⁵⁶; 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 any one who belongs to the household of the pope or of the cardinals¹⁵⁷ 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,

¹⁵⁵ i. e., A living which has not hitherto been filled by papal appointment.

¹⁵⁶ 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.)

¹⁵⁷ *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.

if he only goes on a pleasure-ride, takes with him three or our 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 enough¹⁵⁸. "Afterwards we will make all the German bishops cardinals so that there will be nothing let outside."

Third, When a contest has started at Rome over a benefice¹⁵⁹. This I hold to be almost the commonest and widest road or 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 money¹⁶⁰. Such a living rightly or wrongly

¹⁵⁸ In 1513 Albrecht of Brandenburg was made Archbishop of Magdeburg and later in the same year Administrator of Halberstadt; in 1514 he became Archbishop of Mainz as well. In 1518 he was made cardinal.

¹⁵⁹ This rule, like the others mentioned above, is contained in the Concordat of Vienna.

¹⁶⁰ 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

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 [Gen. 19:24]. Why should there be a pope in Christendom, if his power is used or nothing else than such archknavery, and if he protects and practices it? O noble princes and lords, how long will ye leave your lands and people naked to these ravening wolves!

[Sidenote: The Pallium]

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*¹⁶¹, and bind himself with terrible

benefices. (Wrede, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 677 f.)

¹⁶¹ 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. I*) 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 sees, and was a fixed sum in each case. The *Gravamina* of 1521 complain that the price has been raised: "Although

oaths to be the pope's servant¹⁶². 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 be 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 contests lessened, the chapters¹⁶³ 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 archknives 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 Strassburg¹⁶⁴ 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

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.)

¹⁶² The oath of allegiance to the pope was required before the *pallium* could be bestowed (*Dist. C, c. I*). The canon law describes this oath as one "of allegiance, obedience and unity" (X, I, 6, c. 4).

¹⁶³ See above, p. 86, note 2.

¹⁶⁴ cf. Luther to Spalatin, June 25, 1520 (Enders, II, 424; Smith, No. 271).

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!" [John 20:15-17] 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 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 let 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 though they are not unfilled¹⁶⁵. And this he does in many ways, as follows:

[Sidenote: Coadjutorships]

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

¹⁶⁵ i. e., The benefices are treated as though they were vacant.

See gives a coadjutor, i. e., an "assistant," or the coadjutor's benefit, because he is a "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 living¹⁶⁶ must be surrendered, and the whole thing all into the hands of Rome.

[Sidenote: Commendations]

Second, There is a little word *commend*¹⁶⁷, 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 or it, or build it up,

¹⁶⁶ In the case of certain endowed benefices the right to 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.

¹⁶⁷ *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 fulfil 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).

but he is to drive out the incumbent, to receive the goods and revenues, and to install some apostate, renegade monk¹⁶⁸, 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 our 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.

[Sidenote: Incorporation]

[Sidenote: Union]

Third, There are some benefices which they call *incompatibilia*¹⁶⁹, 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 canon law by making

¹⁶⁸ A monk who deserted his monastery was known as an "apostate."

¹⁶⁹ i. e., Offices which cannot be united in the hands of one man. See e. g., note 3, p. 91.

"glosses,"¹⁷⁰ 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"¹⁷¹ from the pope or his *datarius*¹⁷². 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 courtesan¹⁷³ 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

¹⁷⁰ 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 cases 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. 588 f.

¹⁷¹ The thing which was bought was, of course, the dispensation, or permission to avail oneself of the gloss.

¹⁷² *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.

¹⁷³ 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, 291 ff. Between 1513 and 1521, Zink received 56 appointments, and Ingenwinkel received, between 1496 and 1521, no fewer than 106.

imagine or himself. In this way the Germans are to have their purses eased and their itch cured.

[Sidenote: Administration]

Another of the "glosses" is the *administratio*, i. e., a man may have beside his bishopric, an abbacy or a dignity¹⁷⁴, and possess all the property which goes with it, only he has no other title than that of "administrator."¹⁷⁵ 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 II Peter ii: "There shall come false teachers, who in covetousness, with feigned words, shall make merchandise of you, to get their gains." [2 Pet. 2:3]

[Sidenote: Regression]

Again, dear Roman Avarice has invented the custom of selling and bestowing livings to such advantage that the seller or disposer retains reversionary rights¹⁷⁶ 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

¹⁷⁴ See above, p. 87, note 1.

¹⁷⁵ So Albrecht of Mainz bore the title of "administrator" of Halberstadt.

¹⁷⁶ The name of this practice was "regression" (*regressus*).

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 revenue¹⁷⁷. In olden times this was simony¹⁷⁸. 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 treated the garments of Christ. [Matt. 27:35]

[Sidenote: Reservation in pectore]

Yet all that has hitherto been said is ancient history and an every-day 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

¹⁷⁷ 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, for a fixed sum of money for the use of his name (Wrede, *op. cit.*, II, 712).

¹⁷⁸ *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 normally conferred by a ritual act of the Church. In the ancient and earlier mediæval 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 offence 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.

of his authority."¹⁷⁹ 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 second¹⁸⁰. If it is said that this is unjust, then the Most Holy Father must make some excuse, that he may not be reproved or 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.

¹⁷⁹ 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 *proprio motu*, 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 *reservatio in pectore* that "it is an easy, agile and slippery thing, and bears no comparison to any other form of cheating" (Ed. Booking, IV, 215).

¹⁸⁰ For a similar instance quoted at Worms (1521), see Wrede, *op. cit.*, II, 710.

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, Cairo¹⁸¹ 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 right 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?

[Sidenote: The Dataria]

Finally, for all this noble commerce the pope has built a warehouse, namely, the house of the datarius¹⁸², in Rome. Thither all must come who deal after this fashion in benefices and livings. From him they must buy their "glosses"¹⁸³ and get the power to practice such archknavery. In former times Rome

¹⁸¹ 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.;

¹⁸² Built by Innocent VIII (1454-1490).

¹⁸³ See above, p. 93, note 2.

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 only these, but all sorts of usury¹⁸⁴ are here made honest, Phil. 2:5 for a consideration, and the possession of all property acquired by theft or robbery is legalised. 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 defect¹⁸⁵. 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 himself¹⁸⁶ 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 *compositiones*¹⁸⁷!

¹⁸⁴ The Church law forbade the taking of interest on loans of money.

¹⁸⁵ During the Middle Ages all questions 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.

¹⁸⁶ i. e., By buying dispensations.

¹⁸⁷ The sums paid or special dispensations were so called.

"Compositions" indeed! rather "confusions"! Oh, what a modest tax is the Rhine-toll¹⁸⁸, 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 or 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 opposite¹⁸⁹.

[Sidenote: The Fuggers]

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 Augsburg¹⁹⁰,

¹⁸⁸ The toll which the "robber-barons" of the Rhine levied upon merchants passing through their domains.

¹⁸⁹ *Ja wend das blat umb szo indistu es*—The translators have adopted the interpretation of O. Clemen, *L's. Werke*, I, 383.

¹⁹⁰ 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

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 confession¹⁹¹, "butter-letters"¹⁹² and other *confessionalia*¹⁹³,—all this I consider mere patch-work, and like casting a single devil more into hell¹⁹⁴. Not that they bring in little, for a mighty king could well support himself on their returns, 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

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.

¹⁹¹ 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.

¹⁹² Certificates granting their possessor permission to eat milk, eggs, butter and cheese on fast days.

¹⁹³ The word is used here in the broad sense, and means dispensations of all sorts, including those just mentioned, relating to penance.

¹⁹⁴ Equivalent to "carrying coals to Newcastle."

time I shall inquire about that, for Campoflore¹⁹⁵ and Belvidere¹⁹⁶ 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 *officia*¹⁹⁷ 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

¹⁹⁵ The *Campo di Fiore*, a Roman market-place, restored and adorned at great expense by Eugenius IV (1431-1447), and his successors.

¹⁹⁶ A part of the Vatican palace notorious as the banqueting-hall of Alexander VI (1402-1503), 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.

¹⁹⁷ i. e., The offices and positions in Rome which were for sale. See Benrath, p. 88, note 18; p. 95, note 36.

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 or use against the Turks.

III. PROPOSALS FOR REFORM

Now, although I am too small a man to make propositions which might effect a reform in this dreadful state of things, nevertheless I may as well sing my fool's song to the end, and say, so far as I am able, what could and should be done by the temporal authorities or by a general council.

[Sidenote: Abolition of Annates]

1. *Every prince, nobleman and city should boldly forbid their subjects to pay the annates to Rome and should abolish them entirely¹⁹⁸; for the pope has broken the compact, and made the annates a robbery, to the injury and shame of the whole German nation. He gives them to his friends, sells them for large amounts of money, and uses them to endow offices. He has thus lost his right to them, and deserves punishment. It is therefore the duty of the temporal authorities to protect the innocent and prevent injustice, as Paul teaches in Romans xiii [Rom. 13:4], and St. Peter in I Peter ii [1 Pet. 2:14], Rom. and even the canon law in Case 16,*

¹⁹⁸ See above, p. 84, note 1.

*Question 7, de filiis*¹⁹⁹. Thus it has come about that men are saying to the pope and his followers, *Tu ora*, "Thou shalt pray"; to the emperor and his followers, *Tu protege*, "Thou shalt guard"; to the common man, *Tu labora*, "Thou shalt work." Not, however, as though everyone were not to pray, guard and work; for the man who is diligent in his calling is praying, guarding and working in all that he does, but everyone should have his own especial task.

[Sidenote: Prohibition of Roman Appointments]

2. *Since the pope with his Roman practices—his commends*²⁰⁰, *adjutories*²⁰¹, *reservations*²⁰², *gratiae expectativae*²⁰³, *papal months*²⁰⁴, *incorporations*²⁰⁵, *unions*²⁰⁶, *pallia*²⁰⁷, *rules in chancery*²⁰⁸, and such like knavery—usurps all the German

¹⁹⁹ The passage is chapter 31, *Filiis vel nepotibus*. It provides that in case the income of endowments bequeathed to the Church is misused, and appeals to the bishop and archbishop fail to correct the misuse, the heirs of the testator may appeal to the royal courts. Luther wishes this principle applied to the annates.

²⁰⁰ See above, pp. 91 f.

²⁰¹ See above, p. 91.

²⁰² See above, p. 94.

²⁰³ i. e.. Promises to bestow on certain persons livings not yet vacant. Complaint of the evils arising out of the practice was continually heard from the year 1416. For the complaints made at Worms (1521), see Wrede, *op. cit.*, II, 710.

²⁰⁴ See above, pp. 86 f.

²⁰⁵ See above, pp. 92 f.

²⁰⁶ See above, p. 93.

²⁰⁷ See above, p. 89.

²⁰⁸ Rules for the transaction of papal business, including such matters as appointments and the like. At Worms (1521) the Estates complain that these rules

foundations without authority and right, and gives and sells them to foreigners at Rome, who do nothing in German lands to earn them; and since he thereby robs the ordinaries²⁰⁹ of their rights, makes the bishops mere ciphers and figure-heads, and acts against his own canon law, against nature and against reason, until it has finally gone so far that out of sheer avarice the livings and benefices are sold to gross, ignorant asses and knaves at Rome, while pious and learned folk have no profit of their wisdom and merit, so that the poor people of the German nation have to go without good and learned prelates and thus go to ruin:

Therefore, the Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom, and should do this for the salvation of the poor souls who must go to ruin through his tyranny. They should ordain, order, and decree, that henceforth no benefice shall be drawn into the hands of Rome, and that hereafter no appointment shall be obtained there in any manner whatsoever, but that the benefices shall be brought out and kept out from under this tyrannical authority; and they should restore to the ordinaries the right and office of ordering these benefices in the German nation as best they may. And if a "courtesan" were to come from Rome, he should receive a strict command either to keep his distance, or else to jump into the Rhine or the nearest river, and take the Roman ban, with its

are made to the advantage of the "courtesans" and the disadvantage of the Germans. (Wrede, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 675 f.)

²⁰⁹ The local Church authorities, here equivalent to "the bishops." On use of term see *Realencyk.*, XIV, 424.

seals and letters, to a cold bath. They would then take note at Rome that the Germans are not always mad and drunken, but that they have really become Christians, and intend to permit no longer the mockery and scorn of the holy name of Christ, under which all this knavery and destruction of souls goes on, but have more regard to God and His glory than to the authority of men.

[Sidenote: Restoration of Local Church Rights]

3. An imperial law should be issued, that no bishop's cloak²¹⁰ and no confirmation of any dignity²¹¹ whatsoever shall henceforth be secured from Rome, but that the Church ordinance of the most holy and most famous Council of Nicaea²¹² shall be restored, in which it is decreed that a bishop shall be confirmed by the two nearest bishops or by the archbishop. If the pope will break the statutes of this and of all other councils, what is the use of holding councils; or who has given him the authority thus to despise and break the rules of councils?

If he has this power then we should depose all bishops, archbishops and primates²¹³ and make them mere parish-priests, so that the pope alone may be over them, as he now is. He leaves to bishops, archbishops and primates no regular authority

²¹⁰ The sign of the episcopal office; as regards archbishops, the *pallium*; see above, p. 8q, and note.

²¹¹ See above, p. 87, note 1.

²¹² The first of the ecumenical councils (A. D. 325). The decree to which Luther here refers is canon IV of that Council. Cf. Köhler, *L. und die Kg.*, pp. 139 ff.

²¹³ The primate is the ranking archbishop of a country.

or office, usurps everything for himself, and lets them keep only the name and empty title. It has gone so far that by his "exemptions"²¹⁴ the monasteries, the abbots and the prelates are withdrawn from the regular authority of the bishops, so that there is no longer any order in Christendom. From this must follow what has followed—relaxation of discipline and license to do evil everywhere—so that I verily fear the pope can be called the "man of sin." [2 Thess. 2:3] There is in Christendom no discipline, no rule, no order; and who is to blame except the pope? This usurped authority of his he applies strictly to all the prelates, and takes away their rods; and he is generous to all subjects, giving them or selling them their liberty.

Nevertheless, for fear he may complain that he is robbed of his authority, it should be decreed that when the primates or archbishops are unable to settle a case, or when a controversy arises among themselves, such a case must be laid before the pope, but not every little matter²¹⁵. Thus it was done in olden

²¹⁴ "Exemption" was the practice by which monastic houses were withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the bishops and made directly subject to the pope. The practice seems to have originated in the X Century with the famous monastery of Cluny (918), but it was almost universal in the case of the houses of the mendicant orders. The bishops made it a constant subject of complaint, and the Lateran Council (Dec. 19, 1516) passed a decree abolishing all monastic exemptions, though the decree does not seem to have been effective. See *Creighton*, History of the Papacy, V, 266.

²¹⁵ The papal interference in the conduct of the local Church courts was as flagrant as in the appointments, of which Luther has heretofore spoken. At Worms (1521) it was complained that cases were cited to Rome as a court of first instance, and the demand was made that a regular course of appeals should be re-established. Wrede,

times, and thus the famous Council of Nicaea decreed²¹⁶. If a case can be settled without the pope, then his Holiness should not be troubled with such minor matters, but give himself to that prayer, meditation and care for all Christendom, of which he boasts. This is what the Apostles did. They said, "It is not meet that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables, but we will keep to preaching and prayer and set others over the work." [Acts 6:2] But now Rome stands or nothing else than the despising of the Gospel and of prayer, and for the serving of "tables," i. e., of temporal affairs, and the rule of the Apostles and of the pope agree as Christ agrees with Lucifer, heaven with hell, night with day; yet he is called "Vicar of Christ and Successor of the Apostles."

[Sidenote: Exclusion of Temporal Matters from the Papal Court]

4. It should be decreed that no temporal matter shall be taken to Rome²¹⁷, but that all such cases shall be left to the temporal authorities, as the Romans themselves decree in that canon law of theirs, which they do not keep. For it should be the duty of the pope, as the man most learned in Papal the Scriptures and most Holy, not in name only, but in truth, to administer affairs

op. cit., II, 672, 718.

²¹⁶ The reference is Canon V of the Council of Sardica (A. D. 343), incorporated in the canon law as a canon of Nicaea (*Pt. II, qu. 6, c. 5*). See Köhler, *L. und die Kg.*, 151.

²¹⁷ i. e., Appealed to Rome for decision. This is the subject of the first of the 102 *Gravamina* of 1521 (Wrede, *op. cit.*, II, 672).

which concern the faith and holy life of Christians, to hold the primates and archbishops to these things, and to help them in dealing with and caring for these matters. So St. Paul teaches in I Corinthians vi, and takes the Corinthians severely to task or their concern with worldly things [1 Cor. 6:7]. For it works intolerable injury to all lands that such cases are tried at Rome. It increases the costs, and moreover the judges do not know the manners, laws and customs of the various countries, so that they often do violence to the acts and base their decisions on their own laws and opinions, and thus injustice is inevitably done the contestants.

[Sidenote: and from the Bishops' Courts]

Moreover, the outrageous extortion practised by the *officiales*²¹⁸ must be forbidden in all the dioceses, courts so that they may attend to nothing else than matters of faith and good morals, and leave to the temporal judges the things that concern money, property, life and honor. The temporal authorities, therefore, should not permit sentences of ban or exile when faith or right life is not concerned. Spiritual authorities should have rule over spiritual goods, as reason teaches; but spiritual goods are not money, nor anything pertaining to the body, but they are faith and good works.

²¹⁸ The judges in the bishops' courts. The complaint is that they interfere with the administration of justice by citing into their courts cases which properly belong in the lay courts, and enforce their verdicts (usually fines) by means of ecclesiastical censures. The charges against these courts are specified in the *Gravamina* of 1521, Nos. 73-100 (Wrede, *op. cit.*, II, 694-703).

Nevertheless it might be granted that cases which concern benefices or livings should be tried before bishops, archbishops and primates. Therefore, in order to decide contests and contentions, it might be possible for the Primate of Germany to maintain a general consistory, with auditors and chancellors, which should have control over the *signaturae gratiae* and *signaturae justitiae*²¹⁹, that are now controlled at Rome, and which should be the final court of appeal for German cases. The officers of this consistory must not, however, be paid, as at Rome, by chance presents and gifts, and thereby acquire the habit of selling justice and injustice, which they now have to do at Rome because the pope gives them no remuneration, but allows them to fatten themselves on presents. For at Rome no one cares what is right or not right, but only what is money or not money. This court might, however, be paid out of the annates, or some other way might easily be devised, by those who are more intelligent and who have more experience in these matters than I. All I wish to do is to arouse and set to thinking those who have the ability and the inclination to help the German nation become once more free and Christian, after the wretched, heathenish and unchristian rule of the pope.

²¹⁹ The *signatura gratiae* and the *signatura justitiae* were the bureaus through which the pope regulated those matters of administration which belonged to his own special prerogative.

5. *No more reservations should be valid, and no more benefices should be seized by Rome, even if the incumbent dies, or there is a contest, or the incumbent is a "servant" of a cardinal or of the pope²²⁰; and it should be strictly forbidden and prevented that any "courtesan"²²¹ should institute a contest over any benefice, so as to cite pious priests to Rome, harass them and drive them into lawsuits. If, in consequence of this prohibition, there should come from Rome a ban or an ecclesiastical censure, it should be disregarded, just as though a thief were to lay a man under the ban because he would not let him steal. Indeed they should be severely punished because they so blasphemously misuse the ban and the name of God to support their robbery, and with falsely devised threats would drive us to endure and to praise such blasphemy of God's name and such abuse of Christian authority, and thus to become, in the sight of God, partakers in their rascality; it is our duty before God to resist it, or St. Paul, in Romans i, reproves as guilty of death not only "those who do such things," but also those who consent to such things and allow them to be done [Rom. 1:32]. Most unbearable of all is the lying reservatio pectoralis²²², whereby Christendom is so scandalously and openly put to shame and scorn, because its head deals in open lies, and out of love for*

²²⁰ See above, pp. 88 f.

²²¹ See above, p. 88, note 3.

²²² See above, p. 94.

the accursed money, shamelessly deceives and fools everybody.

[Sidenote: Abolition of Reserved Cases]

6. *The casus reservati*²²³, the "reserved cases," should also be abolished, for not only are they the means of served extorting much money from the people, but by means of them the ravening tyrants ensnare and confuse many poor consciences, to the intolerable injury of their faith in God. This is especially true of the ridiculous and childish cases about which they make so much ado in the Bull *Coena Domini*²²⁴, and which are not worth calling daily sins, still less cases so grave that the pope may not remit them by any indulgence; as for example, hindering a pilgrim on his way to Rome, furnishing weapons to the Turks, or tampering with papal letters. With such gross, crazy, clumsy things do they make fools of us! Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the sins which are committed and can be committed against the commandments of God are not reserved cases; but sins against what God has never commanded and what they have themselves devised, these must be reserved cases, solely that no one be hindered in bringing money to Rome, in order that, safe from the Turks, they may

²²³ i. e., The cases in which a priest was forbidden to give absolution. The reference here is to cases in which only the pope could absolve. Cf. *The XCV Theses*, Vol. I, p. 30.

²²⁴ A papal bull published annually at Rome on Holy Thursday. It was directed against heretics, but to the condemnation of the heretics and their heresies was added a list of offences which could receive absolution only from the pope, or by his authorisation. In 1522 Luther translated this bull into German as a New Year present for the pope (*Weimar Ed.*, VIII, 691). On Luther's earlier utterances concerning it, see Kohler, *L. u. die Kg.*, pp. 59 2.

live in luxury and keep the world under their tyranny with their wanton, useless bulls and breves²²⁵.

All priests ought rightly to know, or else there should be a public ordinance to that effect, that no secret sin, of which a man has not been publicly accused, is a reserved case, and that every priest has the power to remit all sorts of sins, however they may be called, so long as they are secret; moreover that no abbot, bishop or pope has the power to reserve any such case to himself²²⁶. If they attempt it, their reservation does not hold and is not valid, and they should be reprov'd, as men who without authority interfere in God's judgment, and without cause ensnare and burden poor, ignorant consciences. But if great public sins are committed, especially sins against God's commandments, then there is indeed a reason for reserved cases, but even then there should not be too many of them, and they should not be reserved arbitrarily and without cause; for Christ has set in His Church not tyrants, but shepherds, as saith St. Peter [1 Pet. 5:3].

[Sidenote: Diminution of the Papal Household]

7. *The Roman See should also do away with the officia*²²⁷, and diminish the swarm of vermin at Rome, so that the pope's household can be supported by the pope's own purse. The pope

²²⁵ The breve is a papal decree, of equal authority with the bull, but differing from it in form, and usually dealing with matters of smaller importance.

²²⁶ Cf. Luther's earlier statement to the same effect in *A Discussion of Confession*, Vol. I, pp. 96 f.

²²⁷ See above, p. 99.

should not allow his court to surpass in pomp and extravagance the courts of all kings, seeing that such a condition not only has never been serviceable to the cause of Christian faith, but the courtiers have been kept thereby from study and prayer, until they are scarce able to speak about the faith at all. This they proved quite plainly at the last Roman Council²²⁸, in which, amongst many other childish and frivolous things, they decreed that the soul of man is immortal and that every priest must say his prayers once a month on pain of losing his benefice. How shall matters which concern faith and the Church be decided by people so hardened and blinded by great avarice, wealth and worldly splendor, that they have only now decreed that the soul is immortal? It is no small shame to all Christians that at Rome they deal so disgracefully with the faith. If they had less wealth and pomp, they could pray and study better, and so become worthy and able to deal with matters of faith, as was the case in olden times when they were bishops, and did not presume to be kings over all kings.

[Sidenote: Bishops' Oaths]

8. *The hard and terrible oaths should be abolished, which the bishops are wrongfully compelled to render to the pope²²⁹, and by which they are bound like servants, as that worthless and*

²²⁸ The Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17).

²²⁹ See above, p. 90, note 1.

*unlearned chapter, Significasti*²³⁰, arbitrarily and most stupidly decrees. It is not enough that they burden us in body, soul and property with their many mad laws, by which faith is weakened and Christendom ruined; but they seize upon the person and office and work of the bishops, and now upon the investiture²³¹ also, which was in olden times the right of the German emperors, and in France and other kingdoms still belongs to the kings. On this point they had great wars and disputes with the emperors²³² until at last, with impudent authority, they took the right and have kept it until now; just as though the Germans, above all the Christians on earth, had to be the puppets of the pope and the Roman See and do and suffer what no one else will do and suffer. Since, then, this is sheer violence and robbery, hindering the regular authority of the bishops and injuring poor souls, therefore the emperor and his nobles are in duty bound to prevent and punish such tyranny.

[Sidenote: Pope and Emperor]

9. *The pope should have no authority over the emperor, except*

²³⁰ In the canon law, *Decretal. Greg. lib. i, tit. 6, cap. 4*. The decretal forbids the bestowing of the pallium (see above, p. 89, note 3) on an archbishop elect, until he shall first have sworn allegiance to the Holy See.

²³¹ The induction of Church officials into office. The term was used particularly of the greater offices—those of bishop and abbot. These offices carried with them the enjoyment of certain incomes, and the possession of certain temporal powers. For this reason the right of investiture was a bone of contention between popes and emperors during the Middle Ages.

²³² Especially in the time of the Emperors Henry IV and V (1056-1125).

that he anoints and crowns him at the altar, just as a bishop anoints and crowns a king²³³; and we should not henceforth yield to that devilish pride which compels the emperor to kiss the pope's feet or sit at his feet, or, as they claim, hold his stirrup or the bridle of his mule when he mounts for a ride; still less should he do homage and swear faithful allegiance to the pope, as the popes have shamelessly ventured to demand as if they possessed that right. The chapter *Solite*²³⁴, in which the papal authority is raised above the imperial authority, is not worth a heller, nor are any of those who rest upon it or fear it; for it does nothing else than force the holy words of God out of their true meaning, and wrest them to human dreams, as I have showed in a Latin treatise²³⁵.

Such extravagant, over-presumptuous, and more than wicked doings of the pope have been devised by the devil, in order that under their cover he may in time bring in Antichrist, and raise the pope above God, as many are already doing and have done. It is not proper for the pope to exalt himself above the temporal authorities, save only in spiritual offices such as preaching and absolving. In other things he is to be subject, as Paul and Peter teach, in Romans xiii [Rom. 13:1], and I Peter iii [1 Pet. 2:13

²³³ The German Empire was regarded during the Middle Ages as a continuation of the Roman Empire. (See below, p. 153.) The right to crown an emperor was held to be the prerogative of the pope; until the pope bestowed the imperial crown, the emperor bore the title, "King of the Romans."

²³⁴ In the canon law, *Decretal. Greg. lib. i, tit. 33, cap. 6*.

²³⁵ In the treatise, *Resolutio Lutheriana super propositione XIII, de potestate papae* (1520). *Weimar Ed.*, II, pp. 217 ff.; *Erl. Ed., op. var. arg.*, III, pp. 293 ff.

f.], and as I have said above.

He is not vicar of Christ in heaven, but of Christ as He walked on earth [Phil. 2:7]²³⁶. For Christ in heaven, in the form of a ruler, needs no vicar, but He sits and sees, does, and knows all things, and has all power. But He needs a vicar in the form of a servant, in which He walked on earth, toiling, preaching, suffering and dying. Now they turn it around, take from Christ the heavenly form of ruler and give it to the pope, leaving the form of a servant to perish utterly. He might almost be the "Counter-christ" whom the Scriptures call Antichrist, for all his nature, work and doings are against Christ, for the destruction of Christ's nature and work.

It is also ridiculous and childish that the pope, with such perverted and deluded reasoning, boasts in his decretal *Pastoralis*²³⁷, that he is rightful heir to the Empire, in case of a vacancy. Who has given him this right? Did Christ, when He said, "The princes of the Gentiles are lords, but ye shall not be so" [Luke 22:25 f.]? Did St. Peter will it to him? It vexes me that we must read and learn such shameless, gross, crazy lies in the canon law, and must even hold them for Christian doctrine, when they are devilish lies. Of the same sort is also that unheard-of lie about the "Donation of Constantine."²³⁸ It must have been some

²³⁶ cf. *The Papacy at Rome*, Vol. I, pp. 357 f.

²³⁷ A decree of Pope Clement V of 1313, incorporated subsequently in the canon law, *Clement, lib. ii, tit. 11, cap. 2*.

²³⁸ A forged document of the VIII Century, professing to come from the hand of the Emperor Constantine (306-337). The Donation conveyed to the pope title to the city of Rome (the capital had been removed to Constantinople), certain lands in Italy

special plague of God that so many people of understanding have let themselves be talked into accepting such lies as these, which are so manifest and clumsy that I should think any drunken peasant could lie more adroitly and skilfully. How can a man rule an empire and at the same time continue to preach, pray, study and care for the poor? Yet these are the duties which properly and peculiarly belong to the pope, and they were imposed by Christ in such earnest that He even forbade His disciples to take with them cloak or money [Matt. 10:10], since these duties can scarcely be performed by one who has to rule even a single household. Yet the pope would rule an empire and continue to be pope! This is a device of the knaves who would like, under the pope's name, to be lords of the world, and by means of the pope and the name of Christ, to restore the Roman Empire to its former state.

[Sidenote: Temporal Power—the Kingdom of Naples]

10. The pope should restrain himself, take his fingers out of the pie, and claim no title to the Kingdom of Naples the and Sicily²³⁹. He has exactly as much right to that kingdom as I have,

and "the islands of the sea." It was used by the popes of the Middle Ages to support their claims to worldly power, and its genuineness was not disputed. In 1440, however, Laurentius Valla, an Italian humanist, published a work in which he proved that the Donation was a forgery. This work was republished in Germany by Ulrich von Hutten in 1517, and seems to have come to Luther's attention in the early part of 1520, just before the composition of the present treatise (C. Enders II, 332). Luther subsequently (1537) issued an annotated translation of the text of the Donation (*Erl. Ed.*, XXV, pp. 176 ff.).

²³⁹ The papal claim to temporal sovereignty over this little kingdom, which comprised the island of Sicily and certain territories in Southern Italy, goes back to

and yet he wishes to be its overlord. It is plunder got by violence, like almost all his other possessions. The emperor, therefore, should not grant him this fief, and if it has been granted, he should no longer give his consent to it, and should point him instead to the Bible and the prayer-books, so that he may preach and pray, and leave to temporal lords the ruling of lands and peoples, especially when no one has given them to him.

[Sidenote: The States of the Church]

The same opinion should hold as regards Bologna, Imola, Vicenza, Ravenna and all the territories in the Mark of Ancona, in Romagna, and in other Italian lands, which the pope has taken by force and possesses without right²⁴⁰. Moreover, he has meddled in these things against all the commands of Christ and

the XI Century, and was steadily asserted during the whole of the later Middle Ages. It was one of the questions at issue in the conflict between the Emperor Frederick II (1200-1260) and the popes, and played an important part in the history of the stormy times which followed the all of the Hohenstaufen. The popes claimed the right to award the kingdom to a ruler who would swear allegiance to the Holy See. The right to the kingdom was at this time contested between the royal houses of France and of Spain, of which latter house the Emperor Charles V was the head.

²⁴⁰ The popes claimed temporal sovereignty over a strip of territory in Italy, beginning at Rome and stretching in a northeasterly direction across the peninsula to a point on the Adriatic south of Venice, including the cities and lands which Luther mentions. This formed the so-called "States of the Church." The attempt to consolidate the States and make the papal sovereignty effective involved Popes Alexander VI (1492-1503) and Julius II (1503-1513) in war and entangled them in political alliances with the European powers and petty Italian states. It resulted at last in actual war between Pope Clement VII and the Emperor Charles V (1526-1527). See Cambridge *Modern History*, I, 104-143; 219-252, and literature cited pp. 706-713; 727 f.

of St. Paul. For thus saith St. Paul, "No one entangleth himself with worldly affairs, whose business it is to wait upon the divine knighthood."²⁴¹[2 Tim. 2:3] Now the pope should be the head and front of this knighthood, yet he meddles in worldly affairs more than any emperor or king. Why then he must be helped out of them and allowed to attend to his knighthood. Christ also, Whose vicar he boasts himself to be, was never willing to have aught to do with temporal rule; indeed, to one who asked of him a decision respecting his brother. He said, "Who made Me a judge over you?" [Luke 12:14] But the pope rushes in unbidden, and boldly takes hold of everything as though he were a god, until he no longer knows what Christ is, Whose vicar he pretends to be.

[Sidenote: Papal Homage]

11. The kissing of the pope's feet²⁴² should take place no more. It is an unchristian, nay, an antichristian thing for a poor sinful man to let his feet be kissed by one who is a hundred times better than himself. If it is done in honor of his authority, why does not the pope do the same to others in honor of their holiness? Compare the two—Christ and the pope! Christ washed His disciples' feet and dried them [John 13:1 ff.], and the disciples never washed His feet; the pope, as though he were higher than Christ, turns things around and, as a great favor, allows people to kiss his feet, though he ought properly to use all his power to

²⁴¹ A free translation of the Vulgate, *Nemo militans Deo*.

²⁴² The kissing of the pope's feet was a part of the "adoration" which he claimed as his right. See above, p. 108.

prevent it, if anyone wished to do it; like Paul and Barnabas, who would not let the people of Lystra pay them divine honor, but said, "We are men like you." [Acts 14:11-16] But our sycophants have gone so far as to make for us an idol, and now no one fears God so much as he fears the pope, no one pays Him such ceremonious honor. That they can endure! What they cannot endure is that a hair's-breadth should be taken away from the proud estate of the pope. Now if they were Christians, and held God's honor above their own, the pope would never be happy while he knew that God's honor was despised and his own exalted, and he would let no man pay him honor until he saw that God's honor was again exalted and was greater than his own.

²⁴³[It is another piece of the same scandalous pride, that the pope is not satisfied to ride or to be driven in a vehicle, but although he is strong and in good health, he has himself borne by men, with unheard-of splendor, like an idol. How, pray, does such satanic pride agree with the example of Christ, Who went on foot, as did all His disciples? Where has there ever been a worldly monarch who went about in such worldly glory as he who wishes to be the head of all those who are to despise and see worldly glory, i. e., of Christians? Not that this in itself should give us very much concern, but we should rightly fear the wrath of God, if we flatter this kind of pride and do not show our indignation. It is enough that the pope should rant and play the

²⁴³ The three paragraphs enclosed in brackets were added by Luther to the 2d edition; see Introduction, p. 59.

fool in this wise; but that we should approve it and tolerate it,—this is too much.

For what Christian heart can or ought to take pleasure in seeing that when the pope wishes to receive the communion, he sits quiet, like a gracious lord, and has the sacrament passed to him on a golden rod by a bowing cardinal on bended knee? As though the holy sacrament were not worthy that a pope, a poor stinking sinner, should rise to show God honor, when all other Christians, who are much more holy than the Most Holy Father, the pope, receive it with all reverence! Would it be a wonder if God were to send a plague upon us all because we suffer such dishonor to be done Him by our prelates, and approve it, and by our silence or our flattery make ourselves partakers of such damnable pride?

It is the same way when he carries the sacrament in procession. He must be carried, but the sacrament is set before him, like a can of wine on the table. In short, at Rome Christ counts for nothing, the pope counts for everything; and yet they would compel us with threats to approve, and praise and honor such antichristian sins, though this is against God and against all Christian doctrine. Now God help a free Council to teach the pope that he too is a man, and is not more than God, as he presumes to be.]

[Sidenote: Abolition of Pilgrimages to Rome]

12. Pilgrimages to Rome²⁴⁴ should either be abolished, or

²⁴⁴ The holy places of Rome had long been favorite objects of pilgrimage, and the practice had been zealously fostered by the popes through the institution of the

else no one should be allowed to make such a pilgrimage out of curiosity or because of a pious impulse, unless it is first recognized by his parish-priest, his town authorities or his overlord, that he has good and sufficient reason for it. I say this not because pilgrimages are bad, but because they are at this time ill-advised. For men see at Rome no good example, but only that which offends; and they have themselves made the proverb, "The nearer Rome, the worse Christians."²⁴⁵ Men bring back with them contempt of God and His commandments. It is said: "The first time one goes to Rome he seeks a rascal, the second time he finds him, the third time he brings him home with him."²⁴⁶ Now, however, they have become so clever that they make the three journeys at once, and they have verily brought back from Rome such pretty things that it were better never to have seen or known Rome.

Even if this reason did not exist, there is still another and a better: to wit, that by these pilgrimages men are led away into a false conceit and a misunderstanding of the divine commandments; or they think that this going on pilgrimage is a precious, good work, and this is not true. It is a very small good work, oftentimes an evil, delusive work, for God has not commanded it. But He has commanded that a man shall care

"golden" or "jubilee years." Cf. Vol. I, p. 18, and below, p. 114.

²⁴⁵ Cf. the Italian proverb, "God is everywhere except at Rome; there He has a vicar."

²⁴⁶ Cf. Hutten's saying in *Vadiscus*: "Three things there are which those who go to Rome usually bring home with them, a bad conscience, a ruined stomach and an empty purse." (Ed. Böcking, IV, p. 169.)

for his wife and children, and look after such other duties as belong to the married state, and besides this, to serve and help his neighbor. Now it comes to pass that a man makes a pilgrimage to Rome when no one has commanded him to do so, spends fifty or a hundred gulden, more or less, and leaves his wife and child, or at least his neighbor, at home to suffer want. Yet the foolish fellow thinks to gloss over such disobedience and contempt of the divine commandments with his self-willed pilgriming, when it is really only curiosity or devilish delusion which leads him to it. The popes have helped this along with their false, feigned, foolish, "golden years,"²⁴⁷ by which the people are excited, stirred up, torn away from God's commandments, and drawn toward their own deluded undertakings. Thus they have accomplished the very thing they should have forbidden; but it has brought in money and strengthened false authority, therefore it has had to continue, though it is against God and the salvation of souls.

In order to destroy in simple Christians this false, seductive faith, and to restore a true understanding of good works, all pilgrimages should be given up; for there is in them nothing good—no commandment, no obedience—but, on the contrary, numberless occasions for sin and for the despising of God's commandments. Hence come the many beggars, who by this

²⁴⁷ The "golden" or "jubilee years" were the years when special rewards were attached to worship at the shrines of Rome. The custom was instituted by Boniface VIII in 1300, and it was the intention to make every hundredth year a jubilee. In 1343 the interval between jubilees was fixed at fifty, in 1389 at thirty-three, in 1473 at twenty-five years. Cf. Vol. I, p. 18.

pilgriming carry on endless knaveries and learn the habit of begging when they are not in want. Hence, too, come vagabondage, and many other ills which I shall not now recount.

If any one, now, wishes to go on pilgrimage or take a pilgrim's vow, he should first show his reasons to his parish-priest or to his lord. If it turns out that he wishes to do it for the sake of the good work, the priest or lord should boldly tread the vow and good work under foot, as though it were a lure of the devil, and show him how to apply the money and labor necessary for the pilgrimage to the keeping of God's commandments and to works a thousandfold better, viz., by spending it on his own family or on his poor neighbors. But if he wishes to make the pilgrimage out of curiosity, to see new lands and cities, he may be allowed to do as he likes. If, however, he has made the vow while ill, then such vows ought to be forbidden and canceled, and the commandments of God exalted, and he ought to be shown that he should henceforth be satisfied with the vow he made in baptism²⁴⁸, to keep the commandments of God. And yet, in order to quiet his conscience, he may be allowed this once to perform his foolish vow. No one wants to walk in the straight and common path of God's commandments; everyone makes himself new roads and new vows, as though he had fulfilled all the commandments of God.

[Sidenote: Reform of the Mendicant Orders]

²⁴⁸ Cf. the statements in the *Treatise on Baptism* and the *Discussion of Confession*, Vol. I, pp. 68 ff., 98.

13. Next we come to that great crowd who vow much and keep little. Be not angry, dear lords! Truly, I mean it well. It is the truth, and bitter-sweet, and it is this,—the building of mendicant-houses²⁴⁹ should no more be permitted. God help us, there are already far too many of them! Would to God they were all done away, or at least given over to two or three orders! Wandering about the land has never brought any good, and never will bring any good. It is my advice, therefore, to put together ten of these houses, or as many as may be necessary, and out of them all to make one house, which will be well provided and need no more begging. It is much more important to consider what the common people need for their salvation, than what St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Augustine²⁵⁰ or any other man has decreed; especially since things have not turned out as they expected.

The mendicants should also be relieved of preaching and hearing confession, except when they are called to this work by the express desire of bishops, parishes, congregations or the temporal authorities. Out of their preaching and shriving there has come nothing but hatred and envy between priests and

²⁴⁹ The houses, or monasteries, of the mendicant or "begging" orders—the "friars." The members of these orders were sworn to support themselves on the alms of the faithful.

²⁵⁰ The three leading mendicant orders were the Franciscan (the Minorites, or "little brothers"), founded by St. Francis of Assisi (died 1226), the Dominican (the "preaching brothers"), founded by St. Dominic (died 1221), and the Augustinian Hermits, to which Luther himself belonged, and which claimed foundation by St. Augustine (died 430).

monks, and great offence and hindrance to the common people. For this reason it should properly and deservedly cease, because it can well be dispensed with²⁵¹. It looks suspiciously as though it were not for nothing that the Holy Roman See has increased this army, so that the priests and bishops, tired of its tyranny, might not some time become too strong or it and begin a reformation which would not be to the liking of his Holiness.

At the same time the manifold divisions and differences within one and the same order should be abolished. These divisions have at times arisen for small reason and maintained themselves for still smaller, combatting one another with unspeakable hatred and envy²⁵². Nevertheless the Christian faith, which can well exist without any of these distinctions, is lost by both sides, and a good Christian life is valued and sought after only in outward laws, works and forms; and this results only in the devising of hypocrisy and the destruction of souls, as everyone may see with his own eyes.

The pope must also be forbidden to found and confirm any more of these orders; nay, he must be commanded to abolish some of them and reduce their number, since the faith of Christ, which is alone the highest good and which exists without any orders, is in no small danger, because these many different works

²⁵¹ The interference of the friars in the duties of the parish clergy was a continual subject of complaint through this period.

²⁵² By the middle of the XV Century there were eight distinct sects within the Franciscan order alone (See *Realencyk.*, VI, pp. 212 ff.), and Luther had himself taken part in a vigorous dispute between two parties in the Augustinian order.

and forms easily mislead men into living for them instead of giving heed to the faith. Unless there are in the monasteries wise prelates, who preach and who concern themselves with faith more than with the rules of the orders, the order cannot but harm and delude simple souls who think only of works.

In our days, however, the prelates who have had faith and who founded the orders have almost all passed away. Just as in olden days among the children of Israel, when the fathers, who knew God's works and wonders, had passed away, the children, from ignorance of God's works and of faith, immediately became idolatrous and set up their own human works; so now, alas! these orders have lost the understanding of God's works and of faith, and only torture themselves pitifully, with labor and sorrow, in their own rules, laws and customs, and withal never come to a right understanding of a good spiritual life, as the Apostle declared when he said, in II Timothy iii: "They have the appearance of a spiritual life, yet there is nothing back of it; they are ever and ever learning, but they never come to a knowledge of what a true spiritual life is." [2 Tim. 3:5, 7] There should be no monastery unless there were a spiritual prelate, learned in the Christian faith, to rule it, for no other kind of prelate can rule without injury and ruin, and the holier and better he appears to be in his outward works and life, the more injury and ruin he causes.

To my way of thinking it would be a necessary measure, especially in these perilous times of ours, that all foundations and monasteries should be re-established as they were at the first, in

the days of the Apostles and for a long time afterwards, when they were all open to every man, and every man might remain in them as long as he pleased. For what were the foundations and monasteries except Christian schools in which the Scriptures and Christian living were taught, and people were trained to rule and to preach? So we read that St. Agnes²⁵³ went to school, and we still see the same practice in some of the nunneries, like that at Quedlinburg²⁵⁴ and others elsewhere. And in truth all monasteries and convents ought to be so free that God is served in them with free will and not with forced avarice. Afterward, however, they hedged them about with vows and turned them into a lifelong prison, so that these vows are thought to be of more account than the vows of baptism. What sort of fruit this has borne, we see, hear, read and learn more and more every day.

I suppose this advice of mine will be regarded as the height of foolishness; but I am not concerned about that just now. I advise what I think best; let him reject it who will! I see how the vows are kept, especially the vow of chastity, which has become so universal through these monasteries and yet is not commanded by Christ; on the contrary, it is given to very few to keep it, as He himself says [Matt. 19:11 ff.], and St. Paul [1 Cor. 7:7, Col. 2:20]. I would have all men to be helped, and not have Christian souls caught in human, self-devised customs and laws.

²⁵³ St. Agnes the Martyr, put to death in the beginning of the IV Century, one of the favorite saints of the Middle Ages. See Schäfer, *L. als Kirchenhistoriker*, p. 235.

²⁵⁴ One of the most famous of the German convents, founded in 936.

[Sidenote: Marriage of the Clergy]

14. We also see how the priesthood has fallen, and how many a poor priest is overburdened with wife and child, and his conscience troubled, yet no one does anything to help him though he might easily be helped. Though pope and bishops may let things go as they go, and let them go to ruin if they will, I will save my conscience and open my mouth freely, whether it vex pope, bishops or any one else. Wherefore I say that according to the institution of Christ and the Apostles every city should have a priest or bishop, as St. Paul clearly says in Titus i [Tit. 1:6]; and this priest should not be compelled to live without a wedded wife, but should be permitted to have one, as St. Paul says in I Timothy iii, and Titus i, "A bishop should be a man who is blameless, and the husband of but one wedded wife, whose children are obedient and virtuous," etc. [1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:6] For with St. Paul a bishop and a priest are one and the same thing, as witness also St. Jerome²⁵⁵. But of bishops as they now are, the Scriptures know nothing; they have been appointed by the ordinance of the Christian Church, that one of them may rule over many priests.

So then we clearly learn from the Apostle that it should be the custom for every town to choose out of the congregation²⁵⁶ a learned and pious citizen, entrust to him the office of the

²⁵⁵ The celebrated Church Father (died 420). The passages referred to are in *Migne*, XXII, 656, and XXVI, 562.

²⁵⁶ Or "community" (*Gemeine*). Cf. *The Papacy at Rome*, Vol. I, p. 345, note 4. See also *Dass eine christl. Gemeinde Recht und Macht habe*, etc. *Weimar Ed.* XI, pp. 408 ff.

ministry, and support him at the expense of the community, leaving him free choice to marry or not. He should have with him several priests or deacons, who might also be married or not, as they chose, to help him rule the people of the community²⁵⁷ by means of preaching and the sacraments, as is still the practice in the Greek Church. At a later time²⁵⁸, when there were so many persecutions and controversies with heretics, there were many holy fathers who of their own accord abstained from matrimony, to the end that they might the better devote themselves to study and be prepared at any time for death or for controversy. Then the Roman See interfered, out of sheer wantonness, and made a universal commandment forbidding priests to marry²⁵⁹. This was done at the bidding of the devil, as St. Paul declares in I Timothy iv, "There shall come teachers who bring doctrines of devils, and forbid to marry." From this has arisen so much untold misery, occasion was given for the withdrawal of the Greek Church²⁶⁰, and division, sin, shame and scandal were increased without end,—which is the result of everything the devil does.

What, then, shall we do about it? My advice is that matrimony

²⁵⁷ Or "congregation." See note 2.

²⁵⁸ i. e.. At a time later than that of the Apostles.

²⁵⁹ The first absolute prohibition of marriage to the clergy is contained in a decree of Pope Siricius and dated 385. See H. C. Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, 3d ed. (1907), I, pp. 59 ff.

²⁶⁰ The priests of the Greek Church are required to marry, and the controversy over celibacy was involved in the division between the Greek and Roman Churches.

be again made free²⁶¹, and that every one be let free choice to marry or not to marry. In that case, however, there must be a very different government and administration of Church property, the whole canon law must go to pieces and not many benefices find their way to Rome²⁶². I fear that greed has been a cause of this wretched unchaste chastity, and as a result of greed every man has wished to become a priest and everyone wants his son to study for the priesthood, not with the idea of living in chastity, for that could be done outside the priesthood, but of being supported in temporal things without care or labor, contrary to the command of God in Genesis iii, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread." [Gen. 3:19] They have construed this to mean that their labor was to pray and say mass.

I am not referring here to popes, bishops, canons and monks. God has not instituted these offices. They have taken burdens on themselves; let them bear them. I would speak only of the ministry which God has instituted²⁶³ and which is to rule a congregation by means of preaching and sacraments, whose incumbents are to live and be at home among the people. Such ministers should be granted liberty by a Christian council to marry, for the avoidance of temptation and sin. For since God has not bound them, no one else ought to bind them or can bind them, even though he were an angel from heaven [Gal. 1:8], still less if

²⁶¹ Cf. Hutten's *Vadiscus* (Böcking, IV, 199).

²⁶² i. e., Lie in Roman appointment.

²⁶³ i. e., The ministry in the congregation. See above, p. 119.

he be only a pope; and everything that the canon law decrees to the contrary is mere fable and idle talk.

Furthermore, I advise that henceforth neither at his consecration to the priesthood nor at any other time shall any one under any circumstances promise the bishop to live in celibacy, but shall declare to the bishop that he has no authority to demand such a vow, and that to demand it is the devil's own tyranny.

But if anyone is compelled to say or wishes to say, as do some, "so far as human frailty permits,"²⁶⁴ let everyone frankly interpret these words negatively, to mean "I do not promise chastity."²⁶⁵ For human frailty does not permit a chaste life²⁶⁶, but only angelic power and celestial might[2 Pet. 2:11]²⁶⁷ Thus he should keep his conscience free from all vows.

On the question whether those who are not yet married should marry or remain unmarried, I do not care to give advice either way. I leave that to common Christian order and to everyone's better judgment. But as regards the wretched multitude who now sit in shame and heaviness of conscience because their wives are called "priests' harlots" and their children "priests' children" I will not withhold my faithful counsel nor deprive them of the comfort which is their due. I say this boldly by my jester's right²⁶⁸.

²⁶⁴ *Quantum fragilitas humana permittit.* A qualification of the vow.

²⁶⁵ i. e., Celibacy. *Non promitto castitatem.*

²⁶⁶ *Fragilitas humana non permittit caste vivere.*

²⁶⁷ *Angelica fortitudo at coelestis virtus.*

²⁶⁸ The court-jester was allowed unusual freedom of speech. See Prefatory Letter

You will find many a pious priest against whom no one has anything to say except that he is weak and has come to shame with a woman, though both parties may be minded with all their heart to live always together in wedded love and troth, if only they could do it with a clear conscience, even though they might have to bear public shame. Two such persons are certainly married before God. And I say that where they are thus minded, and so come to live together, they should boldly save their consciences; let him take and keep her as his wedded wife, and live honestly with her as her husband, caring nothing whether the pope will have it so or not, whether it be against canon law or human law. The salvation of your soul is of more importance than tyrannical, arbitrary, wicked laws, which are not necessary for salvation and are not commanded by God. You should do like the children of Israel, who stole from the Egyptians the hire they had earned [Ex. 12:35 f.], or like a servant who steals from his wicked master the wages he has earned. In like manner steal thou from the pope thy wife and child! Let the man who has faith enough to venture this, boldly follow me; I shall not lead him astray. Though I have not the authority of a pope, I have the authority of a Christian to advise and help my neighbor against sins and temptations; and that not without cause and reason.

First, Not every priest can do without a woman, not only on account of the weakness of the flesh, but much more because of the necessities of the household. If he, then, may have a

woman, and the pope grants him that, and yet may not have her in marriage,—what is that but leaving a man and a woman alone and forbidding them to fall? It is as though one were to put fire and straw together and command that it shall neither smoke nor burn.

Second, The pope has as little power to command this, as he has to forbid eating, drinking, the natural movement of the bowels or growing fat. No one, therefore, is bound to keep it, but the pope is responsible for all the sins which are committed against this ordinance, for all the souls which are lost thereby, for all the consciences which are thereby confused and tortured; and therefore he has long deserved that some one should drive him out of the world, so many wretched souls has he strangled with this devil's snare; though I hope that there are many to whom God has been more gracious at their last hour than the pope has been in their life. Nothing good has ever come out of the papacy and its laws, nor ever will.

Third, Although the law of the pope is against it, nevertheless, when the estate of matrimony has been entered against the pope's law, then his law is at an end, and is no longer valid; for the commandment of God, which decrees that no one shall put man and wife asunder [Matt. 19:6], takes precedence of the law of the pope; and the commandments of God must not be broken and neglected for the sake of the pope's commandment, though many mad jurists, in the papal interest, have devised "impediments"²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ The laws governing marriage were entirely the laws of the Church. The canon law

and have prevented, destroyed and confused the estate of matrimony, until by their means God's commandment has been altogether destroyed. To make a long story short, there are not in the whole "spiritual" law of the pope two lines which could be instructive to a pious Christian, and there are, alas! so many mistaken and dangerous laws that the best thing would be to make a bonfire of it²⁷⁰.

But if you say that this²⁷¹ would give offence, and the pope must first grant dispensation, I reply that whatever offence is in it, is the fault of the Roman See, which has established such laws without right and against God; before God and the Scriptures it is no offence. Moreover, if the pope can grant dispensations from his avaricious and tyrannical laws for money's sake, then every Christian can grant dispensations from them—for the sake of God and the salvation of souls. For Christ has set us free from all human laws, especially when they are opposed to God and the salvation of souls, as St. Paul teaches in Galatians v [Gal. 5:1] and I Corinthians xi [1 Cor. 9:4 ff.; 10:23].

prohibited marriage of blood-relatives as far as the seventh degree of consanguinity. In 1204 the prohibition was restricted to the first four degrees; lawful marriage within these degrees was possible only by dispensation, which was not all too difficult to secure, especially by those who were willing to pay for it (see above, p. 96). The relation of god-parents to god-children was also held to establish a "spiritual consanguinity" which might serve as a bar to lawful marriage. See Benrath, p. 103, note 74, and in the Babylonian Captivity, below, p. 265.

²⁷⁰ This Luther actually did. When he burned the papal bull of excommunication (Dec. 10, 1520) a copy of the canon law was also given to the flames.

²⁷¹ i. e., The marriage of the clergy.

[Sidenote: Abolition of Reserved Cases in the Monasteries]

15. Nor must I forget the poor convents! The evil spirit, who by human laws now confuses all estates in life, and has made them unbearable, has taken possession of in certain abbots, abbesses and prelates also, and causes them so to govern their brethren and sisters as to send them the more speedily to hell, and make them lead a wretched life even here; for such is the lot of all the devil's martyrs. That is to say, they have reserved to themselves in confession, all, or at least some, of the mortal sins which are secret, so that no brother, on his obedience and on pain of the ban, can absolve another from these sins²⁷². Now we do not always find angels everywhere, but we find also flesh and blood, which suffers all bannings and threatenings rather than confess secret sins to the prelates and the appointed confessors. Thus they go to the sacrament with such consciences that they become "irregular"²⁷³ and all sorts of other terrible things. O blind shepherds! O mad prelates! O ravening wolves!

To this I say: If a sin is public or notorious, then it is proper that the prelate alone should punish it, and of these sins only and no others he may make exceptions, and reserve them to himself; over secret sins he has no authority, even though they were the

²⁷² On this sort of reserved cases see Discussion of Confession, Vol. I, pp. 96 ff.

²⁷³ "Irregularity" is the condition of any member of a monastic order who has violated the prescriptions of the order and been deprived, in consequence, of the benefits enjoyed by those who live under the *regula*, viz., the rule of the order.

worst sins that are or ever can be found, and if the prelate makes exceptions of these sins, he is a tyrant, for he has no such right and is interfering in the judgment of God.

And so I advise these children, brethren and sisters: If your superiors are unwilling to grant you permission to confess your secret sins to whomever you wish, then take them to whatever brother or sister you will and confess them, receive absolution, and then go and do whatever you wish and ought to do; only believe firmly that you are absolved, and nothing more is needed. And do not allow yourself to be troubled by ban, "irregularity," or any of the other things they threaten; these things are valid only in the case of public or notorious sins which one is unwilling to confess; they do not affect you at all. Why do you try by your threatenings, O blind prelate, to prevent secret sins? Let go what you cannot publicly prove, so that God's judgment and grace may also have its work in your subjects! He did not give them so entirely into your hands as to let them go entirely out of His own! Nay, what you have under your rule is but the smaller part. Let your statutes be statutes, but do not exalt them to heaven, to the judgment-seat of God.

[Sidenote: Abolition of Mortuary Masses]

16. It were also necessary to abolish all anniversary, mortuary and "soul" masses²⁷⁴, or at least to diminish their number, since

²⁷⁴ The three kinds of masses are really but one thing, viz., masses for the dead, celebrated on certain fixed days in each year, in consideration of the enjoyment of certain incomes, received either out of bequeathed endowments or from the heirs of

we plainly see that they have become nothing but a mockery, by which God is deeply angered, and that their only purpose is money-getting, gorging and drunkenness. What kind of pleasure should God have in such a miserable gabbling of wretched vigils and masses, which is neither reading nor praying, and even when prayed²⁷⁵, they are performed not for God's sake and out of willing love, but for money's sake and because they are a bounden duty. Now it is not possible that any work not done out of willing love can please God or obtain anything from Him. And so it is altogether Christian to abolish, or at least diminish, everything which we see growing into an abuse, and which angers rather than reconciles God. It would please me more—nay, it would be more acceptable to God and far better—that a foundation, church or monastery should put all its anniversary masses and vigils together, and on one day, with hearty sincerity, devotion and faith, hold a true vigil and mass for all its benefactors, rather than hold them by the thousand every year, for each benefactor a special mass, without this devotion and faith. O dear Christians! God cares not for much praying, but for true praying! Nay, He condemns the many and long prayers, and says in Matthew vi, they will only earn more punishment thereby [Matt. 67:7; 23:14]. But avarice, which cannot trust God, brings such things to pass, earing that otherwise it must die of hunger!

[Sidenote: Abolition of the Interdict]

the supposed beneficiaries.

²⁷⁵ i. e., Even when the mass is decently said.

17. Certain of the penalties or punishments of the canon law should also be abolished, especially the interdict²⁷⁶, which is, beyond all doubt, an invention of the evil Spirit. Is it not a devil's work to try to atone for one sin with many greater sins? And yet, to put God's Word and worship to silence, or to do away with them, is a greater sin than strangling twenty popes at once, and far greater than killing a priest or keeping back some Church property. This is another of the tender virtues taught in the "spiritual law." For one of the reasons why this law is called "spiritual" is because it comes from the Spirit; not, however, from the Holy Spirit, but from the evil spirit.

The ban²⁷⁷ is to be used in no case except where the Scriptures prescribe its use, i. e., against those who do not hold the true faith, or who live in open sin; it is not to be used for the sake of temporal possessions. But now it is the other way around. Everyone believes and lives as he pleases, most of all those who use the ban to plunder and defame other people, and all the bans are now laid only on account of temporal possessions, or which we have no one to thank but the holy "spiritual lawlessness."²⁷⁸ Of this I have previously said more in the Discourse²⁷⁹.

The other punishments and penalties,—suspension, irregularity, aggravation, reagravation, deposition, lightnings,

²⁷⁶ See above, p. 72, note 1.

²⁷⁷ See above, p. 104.

²⁷⁸ *Das geistliche Unrecht.*

²⁷⁹ *The Treatise concerning the Ban*, above, pp. 33 ff.

thunderings, cursings, damnings and the rest of these devices, —should be buried ten fathoms deep in the earth, so that there should be neither name nor memory of them left on earth. The evil spirit, who has been let loose by the "spiritual law" has brought this terrible plague and misery into the heavenly kingdom of the holy Church, and has accomplished by it nothing else than the destruction and hindrance of souls, so that the word of Christ may well be applied to them²⁸⁰: "Woe unto you scribes! Ye have taken upon you the authority to teach, and ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. Ye go not in yourselves, and ye suffer not them that are entering." [Matt. 23:13]

[Sidenote: Abolition of Saints'-Days]

18. All festivals²⁸¹ should be abolished, and Sunday alone retained. If it were desired, however, to retain the festivals of Our Lady and of the greater saints, they should be transferred to Sunday, or observed only by a morning mass, after which all the rest of the day should be a working-day. The reason is this: The feast-days are now abused by drinking, gaming, idleness and all manner of sins, so that on the holy days we anger God more than on other days, and have altogether turned things around; the holy days are not holy and the working days are holy, and not only is no service done to God and His saints by the many holy days, but rather great dishonor. There are, indeed, some mad prelates who

²⁸⁰ i. e., To those who teach and enforce the canon law.

²⁸¹ Luther means the saint's-days and minor religious holidays. See also the *Discourse on Good Works*, Vol. I, pp. 240 f.

think they are doing a good work if they make a festival in honor of St. Ottilia or St. Barbara or some other saint, according to the promptings of their blind devotion; but they would be doing a far better work if they honored the saint by turning a saint's-day into a working day.

Over and above the spiritual injury, the common man receives two material injuries from this practice, i. e., he neglects his work and he spends more than at other times; nay, he also weakens his body and unfits it for work. We see this every day, yet no one thinks to make it better. We ought not to consider whether or not the pope has instituted the feasts, and whether we must have dispensation and permission to omit them. If a thing is opposed to God, and harmful to man in body and soul, any community²⁸², council²⁸³ or government has not only the right to abolish it and put a stop to it, without the will or knowledge of pope or bishop, but they are bound on their souls' salvation to prevent it, even against the will of pope and bishop, though these ought to be themselves the first to forbid it.

Above all, we ought utterly to abolish the consecration days²⁸⁴, since they have become nothing else than taverns, airs and gaming places²⁸⁵, and serve only to the increase of God's

²⁸² Or "congregation."

²⁸³ i. e., City-council.

²⁸⁴ *Kirchweihen*, i. e., the anniversary celebration of the consecration of a church. These days had become feast days for the parish, and were observed in anything but a spiritual fashion.

²⁸⁵ i. e., Occasions for drunkenness, gain and gambling.

dishonor and to the damnation of souls. All the pretence about the custom having had a good beginning and being a good work is of no avail. Did not God Himself set aside His own law, which He had given from heaven, when it was perverted and abused? And does He not still daily overturn what He has appointed and destroy what He has made, because of such perversion and abuse? As it is written of Him in Psalm xviii, "With the perverted Thou wilt show Thyself perverse." [Ps. 18:27]

[Sidenote: Extension of Right of Dispensation]

19. *The grades or degrees within which marriage is forbidden should be changed, as, for instance, the sponsorships and the third and fourth degrees; and if the pope can grant dispensation in these matters or money and for the sake of his shameful traffic²⁸⁶, then every parish priest may give the same dispensations gratis and or the salvation of souls. Yea, would to God that all the things which we must buy at Rome to free ourselves from that money-snare, the canon law,—such things as indulgences, letters of indulgence, "butter-letters,"²⁸⁷ "mass-letters,"²⁸⁸ and all the rest of the *confessionalia*²⁸⁹ and knaveries for sale at Rome, with which the poor folk are deceived and robbed of their money; would to God, I say, that any priest could, without payment, do*

²⁸⁶ See above, pp. 96 f.

²⁸⁷ See above, p. 98, note 2.

²⁸⁸ Letters entitling their holder to the benefits of the masses founded by the sodalities or confraternities. See Benrath, p. 103.

²⁸⁹ See above, p. 98, and Vol. I, p. 22.

and omit all these things! For if the pope has the authority to sell his snares for money and his spiritual nets (I should say laws)²⁹⁰, surely any priest has much more authority to rend his nets and for God's sake to tread them under foot. But if he has not this right, neither has the pope the right to sell them at his shameful fair²⁹¹.

This is the place to say too that the fasts should be matters of liberty, and all sorts of food made free, as the Gospel makes them [Matt. 15:11]. For at Rome they themselves laugh at the fasts, making us foreigners eat the oil with which they would not grease their shoes, and afterwards selling us liberty to eat butter and all sorts of other things; yet the holy Apostle says that in all these things we already have liberty through the Gospel [1 Cor. 10:25 ff.]. But they have caught us with their canon law and stolen our rights from us, so that we may have to buy them back with money. Thus they have made our consciences so timid and shy that it is no longer easy to preach about this liberty because the common people take such great offence, thinking it a greater sin to eat butter than to lie, to swear, or even to live unchastely. Nevertheless, what men have decreed, that is the work of man; put it where you will²⁹², nothing good ever comes out of it.

[Sidenote: Prohibition of Pilgrimages]

20. The forest chapels and rustic churches²⁹³ must be utterly

²⁹⁰ The pun is untranslatable,—*Netz, Gesetz solt ich sagen*.

²⁹¹ What the pope sold was release from the "snares" and "nets," viz., dispensation.

²⁹² i. e., Even into the law of the church.

²⁹³ *Die wilden Kapellen und Feldkirchen*, i. e., churches which are built in the country,

destroyed,—those, namely, to which the recent pilgrimages have been directed,—Wilsnack²⁹⁴, Sternberg²⁹⁵, Trier²⁹⁶, the Grimmenthal²⁹⁷, and now Regensburg²⁹⁸ and a goodly number of others. Oh, what a terrible and heavy account will the bishops have to render, who permit this devilish deceit and receive its profits!²⁹⁹ They should be the first to forbid it, and yet they think

where there are no congregations.

²⁹⁴ A little town in East Prussia, where was displayed a sacramental wafer, said to have been miraculously preserved from a fire which destroyed the church in 1383. It was alleged that at certain times this wafer exuded drops of blood, revered as the blood of Christ, and many miracles were said to have been performed by it. Wilsnack early became a favorite resort for pilgrims. In 1412 the archbishop of Prague, at the instigation of John Hus, forbade the Bohemians to go there. Despite the protests of the Universities of Leipzig and Erfurt, Pope Eugenius IV in 1446 granted special indulgences for this pilgrimage, and the popularity of the shrine was undiminished until the time of the Reformation. Cf. *Realencyk*, xxi, pp. 347 ff.

²⁹⁵ In Mecklenburg, where another relic of "the Holy Blood" was displayed after 1491. C. Benrath, pp. 104 f.

²⁹⁶ The "Holy Coat of Trier" was believed by the credulous to be the seamless coat of Christ, which the soldiers did not rend. It was first exhibited in 1512, but was said to have been presented to the cathedral church of Trier by the Empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great.

²⁹⁷ Pilgrimage to the Grimmenthal in Meiningen began in 1499. An image of the Virgin, declared to have been miraculously created, was displayed there, and was alleged to work wonderful cures, especially of syphilis.

²⁹⁸ The "Fair Virgin (*die schöne Maria*) of Regensburg" was an image of the Virgin similar to that exhibited in the Grimmenthal. The shrine was opened March 25, 1519, and within a month 50,000 pilgrims are said to have worshipped there. (*Weimar Ed.*, VI, 447, note 1). For another explanation see Benrath, p. 105.

²⁹⁹ The pilgrimages were a source of large revenue, derived from the sale of medals which were worn as amulets, the fees for masses at the shrines, and the free-will

it a divine and holy thing, and do not see that it is the devil's doing, to strengthen avarice, to create a false, feigned faith, to weaken the parish churches, to multiply taverns and harlotry, to waste money and labor, and to lead the poor folk by the nose. If they had only read the Scriptures to as good purpose as they have read their damnable canon law, they would know well how to deal with this matter.

That miracles are done at these places does not help things, for the evil spirit can do miracles, as Christ has told us in Matthew xxiv [Matt. 24:24]. If they took the matter seriously and forbade this sort of thing, the miracles would quickly come to an end; on the other hand, if the thing were of God their prohibition would not hinder it [Acts 5:39]. And if there were no other evidence that it is not of God, this would be enough,—that people run to these places in excited crowds, as though they had lost their reason, like herds of cattle; for this cannot possibly be of God. Moreover, God has commanded nothing of all this; there is neither obedience nor merit in it; the bishops, therefore, should boldly step in and keep the folk away. For what is not commanded—and is concerned for self rather than for the commands of God—that is surely the devil himself. Then, too, the parish churches receive injury, because they are held in

offerings of the pilgrims. A large part of this revenue accrued to the bishop of the diocese, though the popes never overlooked the profits which the sale of indulgences or worship at these shrines could produce. In the *Gravamina* of 1521 complaint is made that the bishops demand at least 25 to 33 per cent, of the offerings made at shrines of pilgrimage (Wrede, *op. cit.*, II, 687).

smaller honor. In short, these things are signs of great unbelief among the people; if they truly believed, they would have all that they need in their own churches, for to them they are commanded to go.

[Sidenote: Canonisations to be Prohibited]

But what shall I say? Every one³⁰⁰ plans only how he may establish and maintain such a place of pilgrimage in his diocese and is not at all concerned to have the people believe and live aright; the rulers are like the people; one blind man leads another [Matt. 13:14]. Nay, where pilgrimages are not successful, they begin to canonise saints³⁰¹, not in honor of the saints—for they are sufficiently honored without canonisation—but in order to draw crowds and bring in money. Pope and bishop help along; it rains indulgences; there is always money enough for that. But for what God has commanded no one provides; no one runs after these things; there is no money or them. Alas, that we should be so blind! We not only give the devil his own way in his tricks, but we even strengthen him in his wantonness and increase his pranks. I would that the dear saints were let in peace, and the poor folk not led astray! What spirit has given the pope the authority to canonise the saints? Who tells him whether they are saints or

³⁰⁰ i. e., Every bishop.

³⁰¹ The possession of a saint gave a church a certain reputation and distinction, which was sufficiently coveted to make local Church authorities willing to pay roundly for the canonisation of a departed bishop or other local dignitary. Cf. Hutten's *Vadiscus* (Böcking, IV, 232).

not? Are there not already sins enough on earth, that we too must tempt God, interfere in His judgment and set up the dear saints as lures for money?

Therefore I advise that the saints be left to canonise themselves. Yea, it is God alone who should canonise them. And let every man stay in his own parish, where he finds more than in all the shrines of pilgrimage, even though all the shrines were one. Here we find baptism, the sacrament, preaching and our neighbor, and these are greater things than all the saints in heaven, for it is by God's Word and sacrament that they have all been made saints. So long as we despise such great things God is just in the wrathful judgment by which He appoints the devil to lead us hither and thither, to establish pilgrimages, to found churches and chapels, to secure the canonisation of saints, and to do other such fool's-works, by which we depart from true faith into new, false misbelief. This is what he did in olden times to the people of Israel, when he led them away from the temple at Jerusalem to countless other places, though he did it in the name of God and under the plausible guise of holiness, though all the prophets preached against it and were persecuted or so doing. But now no one preaches against it, perhaps or fear that pope, priests and monks would persecute him also. In this way St. Antoninus of Florence³⁰² and certain others must now be made saints and canonised, that their holiness, which would otherwise

³⁰² Archbishop of Florence (died 1450). He was canonised, May 31, 1523, by Pope Hadrian VI. When Luther wrote this the process of canonisation had already begun.

have served only for the glory of God and as a good example, may serve to bring in fame and money.

Although the canonising of saints may have been good in olden times, it is not good now; just as many other things were good in olden times and are now scandalous and injurious, such as feast-days, church-treasures and church-adornment. For it is evident that through the canonising of saints neither God's glory nor the improvement of Christians is sought, but only money and glory, in that one church wants to be something more and have something more than others, and would be sorry if another had the same thing and its advantage were common property. So entirely, in these last, evil days, have spiritual goods been misused and applied to the gaining of temporal goods, that everything, even God Himself, has been forced into the service of avarice. And even these special advantages lead only to dissensions, divisions and pride, in that the churches, differing from one another, hold each other in contempt, and exalt themselves one above another, though all the gifts which God bestows are the common and equal property of all churches and should only serve the cause of unity. The pope, too, is glad of the present state of affairs; he would be sorry if all Christians were equal and were at one.

[Sidenote: Prohibition of Special Privileges]

This is the place to speak of the church licenses, bulls and other things which the pope sells at his laying-place in Rome. We should either abolish them or disregard them, or at least make

them the common property of all churches. For if he sells or gives away licenses and privileges, indulgences, graces, advantages, faculties³⁰³ to Wittenberg, to Halle, to Venice and, above, all to his own Rome, why does he not give these things to all churches alike? Is he not bound to do for all Christians, gratis and for God's sake, everything that he can, and even to shed his blood for them? Tell me, then, why he gives or sells to one church and not to another? Or must the accursed money make, in the eyes of His Holiness, so great a difference among Christians, who all have the same baptism, Word, faith, Christ, God and all things? [Eph. 4:4 f.] Are we to be blind while we have eyes to see, fools while we have our reason, that they expect us to worship such greed, knavery and humbug? He is a shepherd,—yes, so long as you have money, and no longer! And yet they are not ashamed of their knavery, leading us hither and yon with their bulls! Their one concern is the accursed money, and nothing else!

My advice is this: If such fool's-work cannot be abolished, then every pious Christian man should open his eyes, and not be misled by the hypocritical Roman bulls and seals, stay at home in his own church and be content with his baptism, his Gospel, his faith, his Christ and with God, Who is everywhere the same; and let the pope remain a blind leader of the blind. Neither angel nor pope can give you as much as God gives you in your parish-church. Nay, the pope leads you away from the gifts of God, which you have without pay, to his gifts, which you must buy;

³⁰³ *Indulta*, i. e., grants of special privilege.

and he gives you lead³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ "Lead," the leaden seal attached to the bull; "hide", the parchment on which it is written; "the string," the ribbon or silken cord from which the seals depend; "wax," the seal holding the cord to the parchment.

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