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LETTER TO THE GERMAN NOBILITY

1520

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INTRODUCTION

This treatise, one of the most significant documents produced by the Protestant Reformation, appeared at a critical point in Luther's career. The Leipzig Debate¹ with John Eck during the summer of 1519 had projected Luther into a position of prominence and attracted support from a wide variety of partisans and sympathizers in humanist circles, episcopal courts, universities, and among the imperial knights. After his return to Wittenberg, while awaiting the decision of the several universities appointed to referee the debate, Luther resumed the whole range of his pastoral and teaching activities. In the five and one-half months after the debate he also published sixteen treatises which, though not so intended, increased his reputation as a controversial figure.

¹ Cf. LW 31, 307–325.

² LW 35, 47–73.

³ The course and details of the quarrel are given in John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert (trans.), Heinrich Boehmer's *Road to Reformation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), pp. 303–305.

One of these treatises, *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods* (1519),² involved him in a quarrel with the bishop of Meissen and, indirectly, with Duke George of Saxony.³ The settlement of this quarrel early in 1520, however, did not satisfy Elector Frederick, for he had known since the previous December that a new attack was being planned in Rome against himself and against Luther, and that this attack involved Eck, who had been summoned to Rome.⁴ By the middle of March, 1520, the condemnation of Luther's position at Leipzig by the faculties of Louvain and Cologne reached Saxony. The elector urged Luther to address a proposal of peace to his opponents, but he refused on the ground that to withdraw from a controversy would be to deny God's Word.⁵

Early in May, 1520, the crude Latin polemic *On the Apostolic See*, written by Augustine von Alvelde, a Franciscan friar, arrived in Wittenberg. Luther did not choose to issue a personal reply, and instead assigned the task to John Lonicer, his *famulus*. But when Alvelde published a similar work in German, Luther replied himself, lest the German-speaking laity be misled. In the concluding section of his reply, *The Papacy at Rome, an Answer to the Celebrated Romanist at Leipzig*,⁶ Luther wrote, "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 appointment 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

⁴ Eck was appointed to a commission to examine Luther's doctrine. This commission drafted the bull, *Exsurge, Domine*, which was published against Luther on June 15, 1520. Cf. LW 31, XIX

⁵ Cf. Boehmer, *Road to Reformation*, p. 305.

⁶ *PE* 1, 327–394. This reply was written during the last two weeks in May, 1520.

in their madness and to increase the abounding misery, until no hope is left on earth except in the temporal authorities. About this, if this Romanist attacks me again, I will say more later. Let this suffice for a beginning.”⁷

Although Alveld did not renew the attack himself, it did come. During the first week in June Luther received a copy of Prierias’⁸ *Epitome of a Reply to Martin Luther*, which contained bold assertions of papal absolutism. Almost immediately Luther published an annotated reprint of this work.⁹ In his preface to this reprint Luther wrote, “And now farewell, unhappy, hopeless, blasphemous Rome! The wrath of God has come upon you in the end, as you deserved, and not for the many prayers which are made on your behalf, but because you have chosen to grow more evil from day to day! We have cared for Babylon and she is not healed. Let us then leave her that she may be the habitation of dragons, spectres, ghosts, and witches, and true to her name of Babel, an everlasting confusion, an idol of avarice, perfidy, apostasy, of cynics, lechers, robbers, sorcerers, and endless other impudent monsters, a new pantheon of wickedness.”¹⁰

The tenor of these words gives significance to a letter written to Spalatin just before June 8, in which Luther states, “I have a mind to issue a broadside [*publicam schedam*] to [Emperor] Charles and the nobility of Germany against the tyranny and baseness of the Roman curia.”¹¹ On June 23 Luther sent the manuscript of *To the Christian Nobility* to Nicholas von Amsdorf. By August 18 the first edition of four thousand copies had come from the press of Melchior Lotther in Wittenberg. Within a week a second, somewhat enlarged, edition was being prepared.

⁷ PE 1, 392–393.

⁸ Sylvester Prierias (1456–1523), a Dominican priest and professor, was the pope’s counselor in matters of faith. He had been influential in securing the condemnation of Reuchlin and had been commissioned to examine Luther’s writings.

⁹ The text of Prierias’ reply with Luther’s notes is given in *Epitoma responsionis ad Martinum Luther* (1520). WA 6, 328–348.

¹⁰ WA 6, 329.

¹¹ WA, Br, 2, 120.

¹² E. Kohlmeyer originally took the position that the attacks of Alveld and Prierias had motivated the intention expressed in the letter to Spalatin. He later modified this view and asserted that these attacks provided the psychological

It would appear that *To the Christian Nobility* was occasioned by the attacks of Alveld and Prierias, and was the fulfilment of Luther’s thinly veiled threat in the concluding section of *The Papacy at Rome* and of his intention expressed in the letter to Spalatin. Luther research over the last half century, however, has challenged this view.¹² Close scrutiny of the text of the treatise, of Luther’s correspondence, and of other contemporary sources and documents has provided new insights into the general background and content of the treatise.

These insights indicate that the present treatise, originally intended as a small booklet,¹³ actually came about as the result of urgent insistence from, and with the extensive co-operation of, unidentified members of the Saxon court, jurists, Wittenberg professors, and other widely respected men.¹⁴ In Luther these men would have a spokesman who could give to the *Gravamina* of the German nation¹⁵ the theological substance and expression which had been lacking previously.

Yet despite the urging and co-operation of others, *To the Christian Nobility* is the product of Luther’s mind, heart, and soul. Firmly convinced of the priesthood of believers, and believing that the German nobility, as a whole, were of the same sincerity of spirit as those nobles he knew at the Saxon court, Luther, in the light of clear historical precedent, confidently conferred upon the crown and the nobility the responsibility and the right to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs to accomplish the reform of the church.

In the three sections of this treatise Luther laid the ax to the whole complex of ideas upon which the social, political, legal, and religious

motivation for Luther to issue his broadside. Cf. Karl Bauer, “Luthers Aufruf an den Adel, die Kirche zu reformieren,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, XXXII (1935), 172.

¹³ Bauer goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the “broadside” (*publicam schedam*), of which Luther wrote to Spalatin, means a small booklet or brochure, longer than a tract, but by no means a major book. Cf. Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹⁴ Bauer supports this view by citing a letter written to Johann Lang by Melancthon at the time the second edition of *To the Christian Nobility* went to press. In this letter Melancthon states that Luther had been motivated to write this treatise by many “whom we esteem.” *Ibid.*, p. 173. The full text of the letter is in *C. R.* 1, 211.

¹⁵ Cf. LW 41, 265, n. 5.

thought of the Western world had been developing for nearly a thousand years. The first section exposes and refutes theologically the three walls behind which the papacy was entrenched. By demolishing the first wall, the concept of spiritual and secular classes, Luther removed the medieval distinction between clergy and laity and conferred upon the state, the rulers of which (as Luther saw it) were Christians and therefore priests, the right and duty to curb evil no matter where it appeared. In rapid succession he demolishes the remaining two walls: the papal claim (most recently advanced by Alveld and Prierias) that only the pope can interpret Scripture, and that because only the pope could summon a council the decisions of a council were invalid without papal sanction. Luther declares that there is no biblical ground for the papal claim of the sole right to interpret Scripture, and he asserts the necessity for Rome to listen to those who can. The third wall collapses under the barrage of Luther's attacks drawn from Scripture, church history, and the assertion that "when necessity demands it, and the pope is an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a true member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council."¹⁶

The second part of the work is a bill of particulars, a specific indictment of ecclesiastical abuses with which a general council should deal. These abuses range from the worldliness of the papacy and the curia to benefices and indulgences. For a long time it was assumed that Luther's portrayal of conditions in Rome derived from the recollection of his own stay there in 1510–1511. The evidence uncovered by modern research, however, suggests that he drew less upon his own memory than upon very recent information provided by Reuchlin's lawyer, Johann von der Wieck.¹⁷

Just as specific as the indictments are the proposals for reform which constitute the final section of the work. Here Luther's proposals range from the abolition of annates and the exclusion of the church from political power to popular piety, public provision for the poor, and the relationship between church and state. The latter part of this section deals with education and the economic and social ills afflicting the German nation.

The present translation is a revision of that by Charles M. Jacobs in *PE* 2, 61–164. The German text, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*, is in *WA* 6, (381) 404–469.

TO THE CHRISTIAN NOBILITY OF THE GERMAN NATION CONCERNING THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN ESTATE

1520

Jesus

To the Esteemed and Reverend Master, Nicholas von Amsdorf, Licentiate of Holy Scripture, and Canon of Wittenberg, my special and kind friend, from Doctor Martin Luther.

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

The time for silence is past, and the time to speak has come, as Ecclesiastes says [3:7]. I am carrying out our intention to put together a few points on the matter of the reform of the Christian estate, to be laid before the Christian nobility of the German nation, in the hope that God may help his church through the laity, since the clergy, to whom this task more properly belongs, have grown quite indifferent. I am sending the whole thing to you, reverend sir, [that you may give] an opinion on it and, where necessary, improve it.

I know full well that I shall not escape the charge of presumption because I, a despised, inferior person, venture to address such high and great estates on such weighty matters, as if there were nobody else in the world except Doctor Luther to take up the cause of the Christian estate and give advice to such high-ranking people. I make no apologies no matter who demands them. Perhaps I owe my God and the world another work of folly. I intend to pay my debt honestly. And

¹⁶ Cf. p. 137.

¹⁷ Cf. Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

if I succeed, I shall for the time being become a court jester. And if I fail, I still have one advantage-no one need buy me a cap or put scissors to my head.¹ It is a question of who will put the bells on whom.² I must fulfil the proverb, “Whatever the world does, a monk must be in the picture, even if he has to be painted in.”³ More than once a fool has spoken wisely, and wise men have often been arrant fools. Paul says, “He who wishes to be wise must become a fool” [1 Cor. 3:18]. Moreover, since I am not only a fool, but also a sworn doctor of Holy Scripture,⁴ I am glad for the opportunity to fulfil my doctor’s oath, even in the guise of a fool.

I beg you, give my apologies to those who are moderately intelligent, for I do not know how to earn the grace and favor of the superintelligent. I have often sought to do so with the greatest pains, but from now on I neither desire nor value their favor. God help us to seek not our own glory but his alone. Amen.

At Wittenberg, in the monastery of the Augustinians, on the eve of St. John Baptist [June 23] in the year fifteen hundred and twenty.

To His Most Illustrious, Most Mighty, and Imperial Majesty, and to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, from Doctor Martin Luther.

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

It is not from sheer impertinence or rashness that I, one poor man, have taken it upon myself to address your worships. All the estates of Christendom, particularly in Germany, are now oppressed by distress and affliction, and this has stirred not only me but everybody else to cry out time and time again and to pray for help. It has even compelled

me now at this time to cry aloud that God may inspire someone with his Spirit to lend a helping hand to this distressed and wretched nation. Often the councils have made some pretense at reformation,⁵ but their attempts have been cleverly frustrated by the guile of certain men, and things have gone from bad to worse. With God’s help I intend to expose the wiles and wickedness of these men, so that they are shown up for what they are and may never again be so obstructive and destructive. God has given us a young man of noble birth as head of state,⁶ and in him has awakened great hopes of good in many hearts. Presented with such an opportunity we ought to apply ourselves and use this time of grace profitably.

The first and most important thing to do in this matter is to prepare ourselves in all seriousness. We must not start something by trusting in great power or human reason, even if all the power in the world were ours. For God cannot and will not suffer that a good work begin by relying upon one’s own power and reason. He dashes such works to the ground, they do no good at all. As it says in Psalm 33[:16], “No king is saved by his great might and no lord is saved by the greatness of his strength.” I fear that this is why the good emperors Frederick I⁷ and Frederick II⁸ and many other German emperors were in former times shamefully oppressed and trodden underfoot by the popes, although all the world feared the emperors. It may be that they relied on their own might more than on God, and therefore had to fall. What was it in our own times that raised the bloodthirsty Julius II⁹ to such heights? Nothing else, I fear, except that France, the Germans, and Venice relied upon themselves. The children of Benjamin slew forty-two thousand Israelites¹⁰ because the latter relied on their own strength, Judges 20[:21].

¹ A jocular comparison of the monk’s cowl and tonsure with the jester’s cap and bells.

² I.e., who is the bigger fool.

³ *Monachus semper praesens*.

⁴ Luther often stressed that he had acquired his doctorate and its obligation to teach the gospel not out of his own desire but out of obedience to his superiors. Cf. LW 48, 6, n. 5.

⁵ See p. 91, n. 52.

⁶ Charles V, who had been elected emperor in 1519 when only twenty years of age, and whom Luther appeared before at the Diet of Worms in 1521.

⁷ Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1152–1190).

⁸ Frederick II (1212–1250), grandson of Barbarossa and last of the great Hohenstaufen emperors, died under excommunication.

⁹ Pope Julius II (1503–1513) was notorious for his unscrupulous use of political power. Continually involved in war, he led his armies in person and was “the scourge of Italy.”

¹⁰ Luther’s memory is not accurate here. The Book of Judges speaks of twenty-two thousand.

That it may not so fare with us and our noble Charles, we must realize that in this matter we are not dealing with men, but with the princes of hell. These princes could fill the world with war and bloodshed, but war and bloodshed do not overcome them. We must tackle this job by renouncing trust in physical force and trusting humbly in God. We must seek God's help through earnest prayer and fix our minds on nothing else than the misery and distress of suffering Christendom without regard to what evil men deserve. Otherwise, we may start the game with great prospects of success, but when we get into it the evil spirits will stir up such confusion that the whole world will swim in blood, and then nothing will come of it all. 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 the fear of God. If the popes and Romanists¹¹ have hitherto been able to set kings against each other by the devil's help, they may well be able to do it again if we were to go ahead without the help of God on our own strength and by our own cunning.

The Romanists have very cleverly built three walls around themselves. Hitherto they have protected themselves by these walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them. As a result, the whole of Christendom has fallen abominably.

In the first place, when pressed by the temporal power they have made decrees and declared that the temporal power had no jurisdiction over them, but that, on the contrary, the spiritual power is above the temporal. In the second place, when the attempt is made to reprove them with the Scriptures, they raise the objection that only the pope may interpret the Scriptures. In the third place, if threatened with a council, their story is that no one may summon a council but the pope.

In this way they have cunningly stolen our three rods from us, that they may go unpunished. They have ensconced themselves within the safe stronghold of these three walls so that they can practice all the

knavery and wickedness which we see today. Even when they have been compelled to hold a council they have weakened its power in advance by putting the princes under oath to let them remain as they were.¹² In addition, they have given the pope full authority over all decisions of a council, so that it is all the same whether there are many councils or no councils. They only deceive us with puppet shows and sham fights. They fear terribly for their skin in a really free council! They have so intimidated kings and princes with this technique that they believe it would be an offense against God not to be obedient to the Romanists in all their knavish and ghoulish deceits.¹³

May God help us, and give us just one of those trumpets with which the walls of Jericho were overthrown¹⁴ to blast down these walls of straw and paper in the same way and set free the Christian rods for the punishment of sin, [and] bring 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.

Let us begin by attacking the first wall. It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12[:12–13] that we are all one body, yet every member has its own work by which it serves the others. This is because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people.

The pope or bishop anoints, shaves heads,¹⁵ ordains, consecrates, and prescribes garb different from that of the laity, but he can never make a man into a Christian or into a spiritual man by so doing. He

¹¹ Advocates of papal supremacy.

¹² Luther alludes here to the failure of the conciliar movement to reform the church. The movement failed chiefly because the papacy refused to submit to the authority of the council. Furthermore, the papacy refused to co-operate in the convening of councils unless the secular powers first swore not to deprive the pope of his authority. In brief, the papacy refused to submit to the authority of either

church or empire. Luther felt that since the church had failed to take the initiative in the matter of reform, the emperor should do so.

¹³ *Spugnissen*, literally, "ghosts." The sense of the passage is that the Romanists have frightened the world with threats of purgatory hell.

¹⁴ Cf. Josh. 6:20.

¹⁵ I.e., confers tonsure.

might well make a man into a hypocrite or a humbug and blockhead,¹⁶ but never a Christian or a spiritual man. As far as that goes, we are all consecrated priests through baptism, as St. Peter says in 1 Peter 2[:9], “You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm.” The Apocalypse says, “Thou hast made us to be priests and kings by thy blood” [Rev. 5:9–10]. The consecration by pope or bishop would never make a priest, and if we had no higher consecration than that which pope or bishop gives, no one could say mass or preach a sermon or give absolution.

Therefore, when a bishop consecrates it is nothing else than that in the place and stead of the whole community, all of whom have like power, he takes a person and charges him to exercise this power on behalf of the others. It is like ten brothers, all king’s sons and equal heirs, choosing one of themselves to rule the inheritance in the interests of all. In one sense they are all kings and of equal power, and yet one of them is charged with the responsibility of ruling. To put it still more clearly: suppose a group of earnest Christian laymen were taken prisoner and set down in a desert without an episcopally ordained priest among them. And suppose they were to come to a common mind there and then in the desert and elect one of their number, whether he were married¹⁷ or not, and charge him to baptize, say mass, pronounce absolution, and preach the gospel. Such a man would be as truly a priest as though he had been ordained by all the bishops and popes in the world. That is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution. This would be impossible if we were not all priests. Through canon law¹⁸ the Romanists have almost destroyed and made unknown the wondrous grace and authority of baptism and justification. In times gone by Christians used to choose their bishops and priests in this way from among their own number, and they were confirmed in their office by the other bishops

¹⁶ Olgotzen. Cf. p. 68, n. 39.

¹⁷ *Ehlich*. *PE* and other English translations also render this word as “married.” It can, however, also mean “legitimately born.” Karl Benrath notes that according to canon law only one born in wedlock may receive ordination as a priest. Cf. *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*. ... Bearbeitet, sowie mit Einleitung und Erläuterungen versehen von Karl Benrath (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1884), p. 83, n. 7.

¹⁸ Canon law which Luther throughout this treatise and elsewhere calls the “spiritual law”, is a general name for the decrees of councils and the decisions of the

without all the fuss that goes on nowadays. St. Augustine,¹⁹ Ambrose,²⁰ and Cyprian²¹ each became [a bishop in this way].

Since those who exercise secular authority have been baptized with the same baptism, and have the same faith and the same gospel as the rest of us, we must admit that they are priests and bishops and we must regard their office as one which has a proper and useful place in the Christian community. For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although of course it is not seemly that just anybody should exercise such office. Because we are all priests of equal standing, no one must push himself forward and take it upon himself, without our consent and election, to do that for which we all have equal authority. For no one dare take upon himself what is common to all without the authority and consent of the community. And should it happen that a person chosen for such office were deposed for abuse of trust, he would then be exactly what he was before. Therefore, a priest in Christendom is nothing else but an officeholder. As long as he holds office he takes precedence; where he is deposed, he is a peasant or a townsman like anybody else. Indeed, a priest is never a priest when he is deposed. But now the Romanists have invented *characteres*

popes collected in the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*. It comprised the whole body of church law and embodied in legal forms the medieval theory of papal absolutism, which accounts for the bitterness with which Luther speaks of it, especially in this treatise. Cf. *PE* 2, 67, n. 2.

¹⁹ Augustine, bishop of Hippo (395–430).

²⁰ Ambrose, bishop of Milan (374–397), was elected to the office by the people of Milan, even though he was not yet baptized.

²¹ Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (247–258), was also elected to the episcopate by the laity.

*indelebiles*²² and say²³ that a deposed priest is nevertheless something different from a mere layman. They hold the illusion that a priest can never be anything other than a priest, or ever become a layman. All this is just contrived talk, and human regulation.

It follows from this argument that there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status. They are all of the spiritual estate, all are truly priests, bishops, and popes. But they do not all have the same work to do. Just as all priests and monks do not have the same work. This is the teaching of St. Paul in Romans 12[:4–5] and 1 Corinthians 12[:12] and in 1 Peter 2[:9], as I have said above, namely, that we are all one body of Christ the Head, and all members one of another. Christ does not have two different bodies, one temporal, the other spiritual. There is but one Head and one body.

Therefore, just as those who are now called “spiritual,” that is, 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 the sword and rod in their hand to punish the wicked and protect the good. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another [1 Cor. 12:14–26].

²² The *character indelebilis* or “indelible mark,” was given authoritative formulation in the bull *Exultate Deo* (1439). Eugene IV, summing up the decrees of the Council of Florence, wrote: “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” (Carl Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papstums* [2nd ed.], No. 150). The Council of Trent, in its twenty-third session, July 15, 1563 (Mirbt, *op. cit.*, 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

Consider for a moment how Christian is the decree which says that the temporal power is not above the “spiritual estate” and has no right to punish it.²⁴ That is as much as to say that the hand shall not help the eye when it suffers pain. Is it not unnatural, not to mention un-Christian, that one member does not help another and prevent its destruction? In fact, the more honorable the member, the more the others ought to help. I say therefore that since the temporal power is ordained of God to punish the wicked and protect the good, it should be left free to perform its office in the whole body of Christendom without restriction and without respect to persons, whether it affects pope, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, or anyone else. If it were right to say that the temporal power is inferior to all the spiritual estates (preacher, confessor, or any spiritual office), and so prevent the temporal power from doing its proper work, then the tailors, cobblers, stonemasons, carpenters, cooks, innkeepers, farmers, and all the temporal craftsmen should be prevented from providing pope, bishops, priests, and monks with shoes, clothes, house, meat and drink, as well as from paying them any tribute. But if these laymen are allowed to do their proper work without restriction, what then are the Romanist scribes doing with their own laws, which exempt them from the jurisdiction of the temporal Christian authority? It is just so that they can be free to do evil and fulfil what St. Peter said, “False teachers will rise up among you who will deceive you, and with their false and fanciful talk, they will take advantage of you” [2 Pet. 2:1–3].

For these reasons the temporal Christian authority ought to exercise its office without hindrance, regardless of whether it is pope, bishop, or priest whom it affects. Whoever is guilty, let him suffer. All that canon law has said to the contrary is the invention of Romanist presumption. For thus St. Paul says to all Christians, “Let every soul (I

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.” Cf. *PE* 2, 68, n. 5.

²³ *Schwetzen*; literally, “to chatter nonsense.”

²⁴ The sharp distinction drawn by the Roman church between clergy and laity made possible the contention that the clergy was exempt from the jurisdiction of the civil courts. This is known as *privilegium fori*, i.e., “benefit of clergy.” It was further claimed that the governing of the clergy and the administration of church property were matters for church authorities, and that lay rulers could not make or enforce laws which affected the church in any way. Cf. *PE* 2, 70, n. 1.

take that to mean the pope's soul also) be subject to the temporal authority; for it does not bear the sword in vain, but serves God by punishing the wicked and benefiting the good" [Rom. 13:1, 4]. St. Peter, too, says, "Be subject to all human ordinances for the sake of the Lord, who so wills it" [1 Pet. 2:13, 15]. He has also prophesied in 2 Peter 2[:1] that such men would arise and despise the temporal authority. This is exactly what has happened through the canon law.

So, then, I think this first paper wall is overthrown. Inasmuch as the temporal power has become a member of the Christian body it is a spiritual estate, even though its work is physical.²⁵ Therefore, its work should extend without hindrance to all the members of the whole body to punish and use force whenever guilt deserves or necessity demands, without regard to whether the culprit is pope, bishop, or priest. Let the Romanists hurl threats and bans about as they like. That is why guilty priests, when they are handed over to secular law, are first deprived of their priestly dignities.²⁶ This would not be right unless the secular sword previously had had authority over these priests by divine right. Moreover, it is intolerable that in 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 also belong to the church. Why are your life and limb, your property and honor, so cheap and mine not, inasmuch as we are all Christians and have the same baptism, the same faith, the same Spirit, and all the rest? If a priest is murdered, the whole country is placed under interdict.²⁷ Why not when a peasant is murdered? How does this great difference come about between two men who are both Christians? It comes from the laws and fabrications of men.

²⁵ I.e., temporal.

²⁶ Church authorities insisted that clergy charged with infractions of the laws of the state first be tried in ecclesiastical courts. Priests found guilty by such courts were deprived of their priesthood and were surrendered to the temporal authorities. *PE* 2, 71, n. 1.

²⁷ The interdict prohibits the administration of the sacraments and the other rites of the church within a given territory. Its use was not uncommon in the Middle Ages, and at the height of papal power it proved an effective means of bringing rulers to terms. Innocent III imposed the interdict upon England in 1208, during the reign of King John. Interdicts of more limited local extent were quite frequent. The use of the interdict for trifling infractions of church law was a subject of complaint at the Diet of Worms in 1521 and of Nürnberg in 1524. Cf. *PE* 2, 72, n. 1.

Moreover, it can be no good spirit which has invented such exceptions and granted sin such license and impunity. For if it is our duty to strive against the words and works of the devil and to drive him out in whatever way we can, as both Christ and his apostles command us, how have we gotten into such a state that we have to do nothing and say nothing when the pope or his cohorts undertake devilish words and works? Ought we merely out of regard for these people allow the suppression of divine commandments and truth, which we have sworn in baptism to support with life and limb? Then we should have to answer for all the souls that would thereby be abandoned and led astray!

It must, therefore, have been the chief devil himself who said what is written in the canon law, that if the pope were so scandalously bad as to lead crowds of souls to the devil, still he could not be deposed.²⁸ At Rome they build on this accursed and devilish foundation, and think that we should let all the world go to the devil rather than resist their knavery. If the fact that one man is set over others were sufficient reason why he should not be punished, then no Christian could punish another, since Christ commanded that every man should esteem himself as the lowliest and the least [Matt. 18:4].

Where sin is, there is no longer any shielding from punishment. St. Gregory writes that we are indeed all equal, but guilt makes a man inferior to others.²⁹ Now we see how the Romanists treat Christendom. They take away its freedom without any proof from Scripture, at their own whim. But God, as well as the apostles, made them subject to the temporal sword. It is to be feared that this is a game of the Antichrist,³⁰ or at any rate that his forerunner has appeared.

²⁸ The statement about which Luther here complains is found in the *Decreti Prima Pars*, dist. XL, C. VI, *Si papa*. *CIC* 1, 146. In his *Epitome Prierias* had quoted this canon against Luther: "A *Pontifex indubitatus* [i.e., a pope 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!" *WA* 6, 336. Cf. *PE* 2, 72, n. 1.

²⁹ Gregory the Great (590–604), in *Regula pastoralis*, II, 6. *MPL* 77, 34.

³⁰ Antichrist is the incarnation of all that is hostile to Christ and his kingdom and whose appearance is prophesied in 2 Thess. 2:3–10; 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; and Revelation 13.

The second wall is still more loosely built and less substantial. The Romanists want to be the only masters of Holy Scripture, although they never learn a thing from the Bible all their life long. They assume the sole authority for themselves, and, quite unashamed, they play about with words before our very eyes, trying to persuade us that the pope cannot err in matters of faith,³¹ regardless of whether he is righteous or wicked. Yet they cannot point to a single letter.³² This is why so many heretical and un-Christian, even unnatural, ordinances stand in the canon law. But there is no need to talk about these ordinances at present. Since these Romanists think the Holy Spirit never leaves them, no matter how ignorant and wicked they are, they become bold and decree only what they want. And if what they claim were true, why have Holy Scripture at all? Of what use is Scripture? Let us burn the Scripture and be satisfied with the unlearned gentlemen at Rome who possess the Holy Spirit! And yet the Holy Spirit can be possessed only by pious hearts. If I had not read the words with my own eyes,³³ I would not have believed it possible for the devil to have made such stupid claims at Rome, and to have won supporters for them.

But so as not to fight them with mere words, we will quote the Scriptures. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14[:30], “If something better is revealed to anyone, though he is already sitting and listening to another in God’s word, then the one who is speaking shall hold his peace and give place.” What would be the point of this commandment if we were compelled to believe only the man who does the talking, or the man who is at the top? Even Christ said in John 6[:45] that all Christians shall be taught by God. If it were to happen that the pope and his cohorts were wicked and not true Christians, were not taught by God and were without understanding, and at the same time some

obscure person had a right understanding, why should the people not follow the obscure man? Has the pope not erred many times? Who would help Christendom when the pope erred if we did not have somebody we could trust more than him, somebody who had the Scriptures on his side?

Therefore, their claim that only the pope may interpret Scripture is an outrageous fancied fable. They cannot produce a single letter [of Scripture] to maintain that the interpretation of Scripture or the confirmation of its interpretation belongs to the pope alone. They themselves have usurped this power. And although they allege that this power was given to St. Peter when the keys were given him, it is clear enough that the keys were not given to Peter alone but to the whole community. Further, the keys were not ordained for doctrine or government, but only for the binding or loosing of sin.³⁴ Whatever else or whatever more they arrogate to themselves on the basis of the keys is a mere fabrication. But Christ’s words to Peter, “I have prayed for you that your 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 17[:9, 20], “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.” Is that not clear enough?

Just think of it! The Romanists must admit that there are among us good Christians who have the true faith, spirit, understanding, word, and mind of Christ. Why, then, should we reject the word and understanding of good Christians and follow the pope, who has neither faith nor the Spirit? To follow the pope would be to deny the whole

³¹ The doctrine of papal infallibility was never officially sanctioned in the Middle Ages, but the claim was repeatedly made by the champions of papal power, e.g., Augustinus Triumphus (d. 1328) in his *Summa de potestate Papae*. In his attack on the *Ninety-five Theses* (*Dialogus de potestate Papae*, December, 1517) Sylvester Prierias had asserted, “The supreme pontiff cannot err when giving a decision as pontiff, i.e., when speaking officially [*ex officio*]”; and also, “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” (*EA Var. arg.* 1, 348). In the *Epitome Prierias* 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” (*WA* 6, 337). Cf. *PE* 2, 73, n. 5.

³² I.e., a single letter of Scripture to support their claim.

³³ See the reference to the *Epitome* of Prierias on p. 132, n. 28.

³⁴ Matt. 16:19; 18:18, and John 20:23. Throughout his career Luther dealt with the office of the keys. He first mentioned it in 1517 in his *Ninety-five Theses* (*LW* 31, 27, 31) and devoted a substantial portion of his last treatise, *Against the Roman Papacy, An Institution of the Devil* (1545) to a discussion of the keys (*LW* 41, 315–320 *passim*). His clearest and most extensive treatment was set forth in his 1530 treatise *The Keys* (*LW* 40, 321–377).

faith³⁵ as well as the Christian church. Again, if the article, “I believe in one holy Christian church,” is correct, then the pope cannot be the only one who is right. Otherwise, we would have to confess,³⁶ “I believe in the pope at Rome.” This would reduce the Christian church to one man, and be nothing else than a devilish and hellish error.

Besides, if we are all priests, as was said above, and all have one faith, one gospel, one sacrament,³⁷ why should we not also have the power to test and judge what is right or wrong in matters of faith? What becomes of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2[:15], “A spiritual man judges all things, yet he is judged by no one”? And 2 Corinthians 4[:13], “We all have one spirit of faith”? Why, then, should not we perceive what is consistent with faith and what is not, just as well as an unbelieving pope does?

We ought to become bold and free on the authority of all these texts, and many others. We ought not to allow the Spirit of freedom (as Paul calls him [2 Cor. 3:17]) to be frightened off by the fabrications of the popes, but we ought to march boldly forward and test all that they do, or leave undone, by our believing understanding of the Scriptures. We must compel the Romanists to follow not their own interpretation but the better one. Long ago Abraham had to listen to Sarah, although she was in more complete subjection to him than we are to anyone on earth [Gen. 21:12]. And Balaam’s ass was wiser than the prophet himself [Num. 22:21–35]. If God spoke then through an ass against a prophet, why should he not be able even now to speak through a righteous man against the pope? Similarly, St. Paul rebukes St. Peter as a man in error in Galatians 2[:11–12]. Therefore, it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error.

The third wall falls of itself when the first two are down. When the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by the

³⁵ Literally, “the creed,” referring to the Apostles’ Creed.

³⁶ *Beten*; literally, “to pray.”

³⁷ Luther means baptism. See p. 127.

³⁸ This is another contention of Prierias. On November 28, 1518, Luther appealed his cause from the decision of the pope, which he could foresee 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

Scriptures, to reprove him and to constrain him, according to the word of Christ, Matthew 18[:15–17], “If your brother sins against you, go and tell it to him, between you and him alone; if he does not listen to you, then take one or two others with you; if he does not listen to them, tell it to the church; if he does not listen to the church, consider him a heathen.” Here every member is commanded to care for every other. How much more should we do this when the member that does evil is responsible for the government of the church, and by his evil-doing is the cause of much harm and offense to the rest But if I am to accuse him before the church, I must naturally call the church together.

The Romanists have no basis in Scripture for their claim that the pope alone has the right to call or confirm a council.³⁸ This is just their own ruling, and it is only valid as long as it is not harmful to Christendom or contrary to the laws of God. Now when the pope deserves punishment, this ruling no longer obtains, for not to punish him by authority of a council is harmful to Christendom.

Thus we read in Acts 15 that it was not St. Peter who called the Apostolic Council but the apostles and elders. If then that right had belonged to St. Peter alone, the council would not have been a Christian council, but a heretical *conciliabulum*.³⁹ Even the Council of Nicaea, the most famous of all councils, was neither called nor confirmed by the bishop of Rome, but by the emperor Constantine.⁴⁰ Many other emperors after him have done the same, and yet these councils were the most Christian of all.⁴¹ But if the pope alone has the right to convene councils, then these councils would all have been heretical. Further, when I examine the councils the pope did summon, I find that they did nothing of special importance.

Therefore, when necessity demands it, and the pope is an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a true member of the

councils neither bind nor hold [*nullum ligant vel astringunt*] unless they are confirmed by authority of the Roman pontiff.” *WA* 6, 335; *PE* 2, 77, n. 1.

³⁹ A mere gathering of people as opposed to a *concilium*, i.e., a valid council.

⁴⁰ The Council of Nicaea (325), the first general council, was convened by Constantine to settle the Arian controversy on the relation of Christ to God. Luther’s contention is historically correct.

⁴¹ Luther is referring to the first four ecumenical councils: Nicaea, Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451).

whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council.⁴² No one can do this so well as the temporal authorities, especially since they are also fellow-Christians, fellow-priests, fellow-members of the spiritual estate, fellow-lords over all things. Whenever it is necessary or profitable they ought to exercise the office and work which they have received from God over everyone. Would it not be unnatural 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 because nobody had the authority of the mayor, or because, perhaps, the fire broke out in the mayor's house? In such a situation is it not the duty of every citizen to arouse and summon the rest? How much more should this be done in the spiritual city of Christ if a fire of offense breaks out, whether in the papal government, or anywhere else! The same argument holds if an enemy were to attack a city. The man who first roused the others deserves honor and gratitude. Why, then, should he not deserve honor who makes known the presence of the enemy from hell and rouses Christian people and calls them together?

But all their boasting about an authority which dare not be opposed amounts to nothing at all. Nobody in Christendom has authority to do injury or to forbid the resisting of injury. There is no authority in the church except to promote good. Therefore, if the pope were to use his authority to prevent the calling of a free council, thereby preventing the improvement of the church, we should have regard neither for him nor for his authority. And if he were to hurl his bans and thunderbolts, we should despise his conduct as that of a madman. On the contrary, we should excommunicate him and drive him out as best we could, relying completely upon God. This presumptuous authority of his is nothing. He does not even have such authority. He is quickly defeated by a single text of Scripture, where Paul says to the Corinthians, "God has given us authority not to ruin Christendom, but to build it up" [2 Cor. 10:8]. Who wants to leap over the hurdle of this text? It is the power of the devil and of Antichrist which resists the things that serve to build up Christendom. Such power is not to be obeyed, but rather resisted with life, property, and with all our might and main.

Even though a miracle were to be done against the temporal authority on the pope's behalf, or if somebody were struck down by the plague—which they boast has sometimes happened—it should be considered as nothing but the work of the devil designed to destroy our faith in God. Christ foretold this in Matthew 24[:24], "False Christs and false prophets shall come in my name, who shall perform signs and wonders in order to deceive even the elect." And Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2[:9] that Antichrist shall, through the power of Satan, be mighty in false wonders.

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, only for Christ" [2 Cor. 13:8]. But if an authority does anything against Christ, then that authority is the power of Antichrist and of the devil, even if it were to deluge us with wonders and plagues. Wonders and plagues prove nothing, especially in these evil latter days. The whole of Scripture foretells such false wonders. This is why we must hold fast to the word of God with firm faith, and then the devil will soon drop his miracles!

With this I hope that all this wicked and lying terror with which the Romanists have long intimidated and dulled our conscience has been overcome, and that they, just like all of us, shall be made subject to the sword. They have no right to interpret Scripture merely by authority and without learning.⁴³ They have no authority to prevent a council, or even worse yet at their mere whim to pledge it, impose conditions on it, or deprive it of its freedom. When they do that they are truly in the fellowship of Antichrist and the devil. They have nothing at all of Christ except the name.

We shall now look at the matters which ought to be properly dealt with in councils, matters with which popes, cardinals, bishops, and all scholars ought properly to be occupied day and night if they loved Christ and his church. But if this is not the case, let ordinary people⁴⁴ and the temporal authorities do it without regard to papal bans and fulminations, for an unjust ban is better than ten just and proper absolutions, and one unjust, improper absolution is worse than ten just

⁴² A council free of papal control. Cf. p. 126, n. 12.

⁴³ *Kunst*; literally, "skill."

⁴⁴ *Der hauff*; literally, rank and file Christians without office or authority in the church.

bans.⁴⁵ Therefore, let us awake, dear Germans, and fear God more than man [Acts 5:29], lest we suffer the same fate of all the poor souls who are so lamentably lost through the shameless, devilish rule of the Romanists. The devil grows stronger⁴⁶ every day, if such a thing were possible, if such a hellish regime could grow any worse—a thing I can neither conceive nor believe.

First. It is horrible and shocking to see the head of Christendom, who boasts that he is the vicar of Christ and successor of St. Peter, going about in such a worldly and ostentatious style that neither king nor emperor can equal or approach him. He claims the title of “most holy” and “most spiritual,” and yet he is more worldly than the world itself. He wears a triple crown,⁴⁷ whereas the highest monarchs wear but one. If that is like the poverty of Christ and of St. Peter, then it is a new and strange kind of likeness! When anybody says anything against it, the Romanists bleat, “Heresy!” They refuse to hear how un-Christian and ungodly all this is. In my opinion, if the pope were to pray to God with tears, he would have to lay aside his triple crown, for the God we worship cannot put up with pride. In fact, the pope’s office should be nothing else but to weep and pray for Christendom and to set an example of utter humility.

Be that as it may, this kind of splendor is offensive, and the pope is bound for the sake of his own salvation to set it aside. It was because of this kind of thing that St. Paul said, “Abstain from all practices which give offense” [1 Thess. 5:22], and in Romans 12[:17], “We should do good, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men.” An ordinary bishop’s mitre ought to be good enough for the pope. It is in wisdom and holiness that he should be above his fellows. He ought to leave the crown of pride to Antichrist, as his predecessors

⁴⁵ The sense of this passage is that if the ecclesiastical hierarchy will not do its duty and convene a council, then the secular authorities and the rank and file Christians must take the matter in hand regardless of ecclesiastical sanctions. Furthermore, to come under one such sanction for the sake of this good cause is better than to receive ten absolutions.

⁴⁶ *Zunympt*; literally, “grows larger” or “increases”.

⁴⁷ The papal crown dates from the eleventh century; the triple crown or tiara, from the fourteenth. It was intended to signify the superiority of the pope over the rulers of this world, of which Luther complains. Cf. *PE* 2, 80, n. 2.

⁴⁸ A statement made by Augustinus Triumphus in his *Summa de potestate Papae*. Cf. B. Ministeri, “*De Augustini de Ancona vita et operibus*,” *Analecta*

did centuries ago. The Romanists say he is a lord of the earth. That is a lie! For Christ, whose vicar and vicegerent he claims to be, said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” [John 18:36]. No vicar’s rule can go beyond that of his lord. Moreover, he is not the vicar of Christ glorified but of Christ crucified. As Paul says, “I was determined to know nothing among you save Christ, and him only as the crucified” [1 Cor. 2:2], and in Philippians 2[:5–7], “This is how you should regard yourselves, as you see in Christ, who emptied himself and took upon himself the form of a servant.” Or again in 1 Corinthians 1[:23], “We preach Christ, the crucified.” Now the Romanists 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 them at his command.⁴⁸ These are certainly the proper works of the real Antichrist.

Second. Of what use to Christendom are those people called cardinals? I shall tell you. Italy and Germany have many rich monasteries, foundations,⁴⁹ benefices, and livings. No better way has been discovered of bringing all these to Rome than by creating cardinals and giving them bishoprics, monasteries, and prelacies for their own use⁵⁰ and so overthrowing the worship of God. You can see that Italy is now almost a wilderness: monasteries in ruins, bishoprics despoiled, the prelacies and the revenues of all the churches drawn to Rome, cities decayed, land and people ruined because services are no longer held and the word of God is not preached. And why? Because the cardinals must have the income! No Turk could have devastated Italy and suppressed the worship of God so effectively!

Augustiniana, Rome, XXII (1952–1953), 7–56, 148–262. In the year 1500 thousands of pilgrims died of plague on the way to Rome. A rumor began to circulate that Pope Clement VI had once given orders that the angels should immediately carry to heaven the souls of those who die on a pilgrimage. This rumor was based on a papal bull, most likely spurious. Luther referred to it in his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* (1521). LW 32, 74–75; WA 7, 421. Cf. LW 32, 75, n. 89.

⁴⁹ *Stift*; i.e., endowed institutions.

⁵⁰ For example, Pope Julius II, when a cardinal, held the revenues of the archbishopric of Avignon, the bishoprics of Bologna, Lausanne, Coutances, Viviers, Mende, Ostia, and Velletri, and the abbacies of Nonantola and Grottaferrata. Cf. *PE* 2, 82, n. 1.

Now that Italy is sucked dry, the Romanists are coming into Germany.⁵¹ They have made a gentle beginning. But let us keep our eyes open! Germany shall soon be like Italy. We have a few cardinals already. The “drunken Germans” are not supposed to understand what the Romanists are up to until there is not a bishopric, a monastery, a living, a benefice, not a red cent left. Antichrist must seize the treasures of the earth, as it is prophesied [Dan. 11:39, 43]. It works like this: they skim the cream off the bishoprics, monasteries, and benefices, and because they do not yet venture to put them all to shameful use, as they have done in Italy, they in the meantime practice their holy cunning and couple together ten or twenty prelaties. They then tear off a little piece each year so as to make quite a tidy sum after all. The priory of Würzburg yields a thousand gulden;⁵² the priory of Bamberg also yields a sum; Mainz, Trier, and others. In this way one thousand or ten thousand gulden may be collected, so that a cardinal could live like a wealthy monarch at Rome.

When we have got that, we shall appoint thirty or forty cardinals in one day.⁵³ We shall give to one of them Mount St. Michael near Bamberg,⁵⁴ along with the bishopric of Würzburg, attach a few rich benefices to them until churches and cities are destitute, and then we will say, “We are Christ’s vicars, and shepherds of Christ’s sheep. The foolish, drunken Germans will just have to put up with it.”

⁵¹ The complaint that the cardinals were provided with incomes by appointment to German benefices goes back to the Council of Constance (1414–1418). Cf. Luther’s complaint in the *Treatise on Good Works*, p. 89.

⁵² Cf. p. 144, n. 58.

⁵³ Luther puts these words into the mouths of the Romanists, hence the change from “they” to “we.” The creation of cardinals was a lucrative matter for the popes. On July 31, 1517, Pope Leo X created thirty-one cardinals. He is reported to have received 300,000 ducats from the appointees. *WA* 6, 417, n. 1; *PE* 2, 82, n. 3.

⁵⁴ A famous Benedictine monastery located outside of Bamberg on Mount St. Michael (*Mönchberg*).

⁵⁵ The Council of Constance had suggested a yearly salary of three to four thousand gulden for cardinals.

⁵⁶ In the fourteenth century England and France enacted laws protecting themselves against these practices. There was a strong anti-clerical and anti-papal movement in England at that time, and much legislation was enacted under Edward I to prevent endowments going to Rome as well as to prevent the appointment of

My advice is to make fewer cardinals, or to let the pope support them at his own expense. Twelve of them would be enough, and each of them might have an income of a thousand gulden.⁵⁵ How is it that we Germans must put up with such robbery and extortion of our goods at the hands of the pope? If the kingdom of France has prevented it,⁵⁶ why do we Germans let them make such fools and apes of us? We could put up with all this if they stole only our property, but they lay waste to the churches in so doing, rob Christ’s sheep of their true shepherds, and debase the worship and word of God. If there were not a single cardinal, the church would not perish. The cardinals do nothing to serve Christendom. They are only interested in the money side of bishoprics and prelaties, and they wrangle about them just as any thief might do.

Third. If ninety-nine per cent of the papal court⁵⁷ “were abolished and only one per cent kept, it would still be large enough to give answers in matters of faith. Today, however, there is such a swarm of parasites in that place called Rome, all of them boasting that they belong to the pope, that not even Babylon saw the likes of it. There are more than three thousand papal secretaries alone. Who could count the other officials? There are so many offices that one could scarcely count them. These are all the people lying in wait for the endowments 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 used to give to the emperors in ancient times. In fact, some have estimated

Roman puppets to English benefices. In France these laws were embodied in the *Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges*, issued by King Charles VII and a council of French clergy on July 7, 1438. This edict breathed the spirit of conciliarism, and was responsible for greatly reducing the receipts of nonresident benefice holders. See *The Cambridge Modern History* (14 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1903–1912), I, 385–386.

⁵⁷ The papal court (*curia*) consisted of all the officials engaged in the transaction of papal business and those who were in immediate attendance upon the person of the pope, the so-called “papal household.” Karl Benrath states that according to a document printed in Rome in 1545 and found among the belongings of John Eck, there were 949 curial positions obtained by the payment of a fee. This figure does not include those officials who had to do with the administration of the city of Rome and the papal states, or the members of the “papal household.” Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 88, n. 18. The *Gravamina* of the German nation presented by the Diet of Worms in 1521 complain that the increase of these offices had added greatly to the financial burdens of the German church. Cf. *WA* 6, 417, n. 4; and *PE* 2, 83, n. 3.

that more than three hundred thousand gulden a year find their way from Germany to Rome. This money serves no use or purpose. We get nothing for it except scorn and contempt. And we still go on wondering why princes and nobles, cities and endowments, land and people, grow poor. We ought to marvel that we have anything left to eat!

Since we have now come to the heart of the matter, we will pause a little and let it be seen that the Germans are not quite such crass fools that they do not see or understand the sharp practices of the Romanists. I do not at the moment complain that God's command and Christian law are despised at Rome, for the state of Christendom is such—Rome in particular—that we may not complain of such exalted matters now. Nor am I complaining that natural law, or secular law, or even reason count for nothing. My complaint goes deeper than that. I complain that the Romanists do not keep their own self-devised canon law, though it is in fact just tyranny, avarice, and temporal splendor rather than law. That I shall now show you.

In former times German emperors and princes permitted the pope to receive annates from all the benefices of the German nation. This sum amounts to one half of the revenue of the first year from every single benefice.⁵⁸ This permission was given, however, so that by means of these large sums of money the pope might raise funds to fight against the Turks and infidels in defense of Christendom, and, so that the burden of war might not rest too heavily upon the nobility, the clergy too should contribute something toward it. The popes have so far used the splendid and simple devotion of the German people—they have received this money for more than a hundred years and have now made it an obligatory tax and tribute, but they have not only

⁵⁸ The annates (*annatae*, *annalia*) were originally the various incomes a bishop received from the vacant benefices in his diocese. In 1317 Pope John XXII fixed the annates at one half of one year's income from the benefice, payable upon the incumbent's accession. Two years later the same pope claimed for himself the annates from all benefices falling vacant during the next two years. These annates were claimed regularly by his successors. After 1418 the term was extended to include the so-called *servitia*, payments which were made to the curia by bishops and abbots at the time of their accession. These charges soon became a fixed tax on all church offices which became vacant, and claims against overassessment and extortion were frequent. The Council of Constance (1415) restricted the obligation of annates to bishoprics, abbaties, and benefices with a yearly income of more than

accumulated no money, they have used it to endow many posts and positions at Rome and to provide salaries for these posts, as though the annates were a fixed rent.

When they pretend that they are about to fight the Turks, they send out emissaries to raise money. They often issue an indulgence⁵⁹ on the same pretext of fighting the Turks. They think that those half-witted Germans will always be gullible, stupid fools, and will just keep handing over money to them to satisfy their unspeakable greed. And they think this in spite of the fact that everybody knows that not a cent of the annates, or of the indulgence money, or of all the rest, is spent to fight the Turk. It all goes into their bottomless bag. They lie and deceive. They make laws and they make agreements with us, but they do not intend to keep a single letter of them. Yet all this is done in the holy names of Christ and St. Peter.

Now in this matter the German nation, bishops and princes, should consider that they, too, are Christians. They should rule the people entrusted to them in temporal and spiritual matters and protect them from these rapacious wolves in sheep's clothing who pretend to be their shepherds and rulers. And since the annates have been so shockingly abused, and not even kept for their original agreed purpose, [the bishops and princes] should not allow their land and people to be so pitilessly robbed and ruined contrary to all law. By decree either of the emperor or of the whole nation the annates should either be kept here at home or else abolished again.⁶⁰ Since the Romanists do not keep to their agreement, they have no right to the annates. Therefore, the bishops and princes are responsible for punishing such thievery and robbery, or even preventing it, as the law requires.

twenty-four gulden. The Council of Basel resolved to abolish them (1489), but could not enforce its decision because the supporters of the council ultimately yielded to Pope Eugene IV. Luther's complaint here is that the annates are not applied to their ostensible purpose, the Crusades. The complaint came up again at the Diet of Worms in 1521, as well as at other diets. Cf. *PE* 1, 383, n. 1; 2, 84, n. 1; cf. also Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 88, n. 19.

⁵⁹ The Crusades indulgence was established by Urban II (1088–1099) and granted to those who personally went to Palestine. In 1198 Innocent III extended it to include those who supported the Crusades in other than military ways.

⁶⁰ Cf. p. 144, n. 58.

In such a matter they ought to help the pope and strengthen his hand. Perhaps he is too weak to prevent such abuse singlehandedly. Or, in those cases where he wants to defend and maintain this state of affairs, they ought to resist him and protect themselves from him as they would from a wolf or a tyrant, for he has no authority to do evil or fight on its behalf. Even if it were ever desirable to raise such funds for fighting the Turk, we ought to have enough sense at least to see that the German nation could be a better custodian of these funds than the pope. The German nation itself has enough people to wage the war if the money is available. It is the same with the annates as it has been with many other Romanist pretenses.

Then, too, the year has been so divided between the pope and the ruling bishops and chapters that the pope has six months in the year (every other month) in which to bestow the benefices which become vacant in his months.⁶¹ In this way almost all the best benefices have fallen into the hands of Rome, especially the very best livings and dignities.⁶² And when they once fall into the hands of Rome, they never come out of them again, though a vacancy may never occur again in the pope's month. In this way the chapters are cheated. This is plain robbery, and the intention is to let nothing escape. Therefore, it is high time to abolish the "papal months" altogether. Everything that has been taken to Rome in this way must be restored. The princes and nobles ought to take steps for the restitution of the stolen property, punish the thieves, and deprive of privilege those who have abused that privilege. If it is binding and valid for the pope, on the day after his election, to make regulations and laws in his chancery⁶³ by which

⁶¹ This whole section deals with the "right of reservation," i.e., the alleged right of the pope to fill vacant church positions by appointment. The papal theory held that the right of appointment belonged to the pope, who in some cases graciously yielded the right to others while reserving it to himself in other cases. The rule of the "papal months" provided that livings (except those of the cathedrals and the chief posts in the monasteries) which became vacant in the months of February, April, June, August, October, and December should be filled by the ordinary methods—election, presentation, and appointment by the bishop, etc. But vacancies occurring in the other months were to be filled by appointment of the pope. Cf. *PE* 2, 86, n. 3.

⁶² A dignity or prelacy was originally an ecclesiastical office in which jurisdiction was exercised in the name of the incumbent. Cf. Albert Hauck (ed.), *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (3rd ed., 24 vols.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896–1913), IV, 658.

our endowed chapters and livings are stolen from us—a thing he has absolutely no right to do—then it should be still more valid for Emperor Charles, on the day after his coronation,⁶⁴ to make rules and laws that not another benefice or living in all Germany should be allowed to pass into the hands of Rome by means of the "papal months." The livings which have already fallen into the hands of Rome should be restored and redeemed from these Romanist robbers. Charles V has the right to do this by virtue of his authority as ruler.

But now this Romanist See of avarice and robbery has not had the patience to wait for the time when all the benefices would fall to it one by one through this device of the "papal months." Rather, urged on by its insatiable appetite to get them all in its hands as speedily as possible, the Romanist See has devised a scheme whereby, in addition to the "annates" and "papal months," the benefices and livings should fall to Rome in three ways.

First, if anyone who holds a "free" living⁶⁵ should die in Rome or on a journey to Rome, his living becomes the property in perpetuity of the Romanist—I ought to say roguish—See.⁶⁶ But the Romanists do not want to be called robbers on this account, though they are guilty of robbery of a kind never heard of or read about before.

Second, if anyone belonging to the household of the pope or cardinals holds or takes over a benefice, or if anyone who had previously held a benefice subsequently enters the household of the pope or cardinals, [his living becomes the property in perpetuity of the Romanist See].⁶⁷ But who can count the household of the pope and

⁶³ Luther refers to the "chancery regulations," which were the policies governing the conferring of reserved benefices, the permissibility of renouncing an office, etc. The pope established these policies, usually just after his ascension to the papal throne. The Germans had protested at the councils of Constance and Basel against the arbitrariness of these regulations, and insisted that such policies be fixed by legislation. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 96, n. 40.

⁶⁴ Charles V had not yet been crowned emperor when this treatise was written. Cf. *PE* 2, 87, n. 2.

⁶⁵ A living not hitherto filled by papal appointment. Cf. *PE* 2, 88, n. 1.

⁶⁶ A rule found in the Concordat of Vienna. Cf. *WA* 6, 420, n. 3.

⁶⁷ The "household of the pope" included all who were in immediate attendance on the pope or the cardinals, and all 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 later refers. Cf. *PE* 2, 88, n. 3.

cardinals? If he only goes on a pleasure ride, the pope takes with him three or four thousand on mules, all emperors and kings notwithstanding! Christ and St. Peter went on foot so that their successors might have all the more pomp and splendor. Now Avarice has cleverly thought out another scheme, and arranges it so that many even outside Rome have the name “member of the papal household” just as if they were in Rome. This is done for the sole purpose that, by the simple use of that pernicious phrase “member of the pope’s household,” all benefices may be brought to Rome and tied there for all time. Are not these vexatious and devilish little inventions? Let us beware! Soon Mainz, Magdeburg, and Halberstadt will quietly slip into the hands of Rome, and then the cardinalate will cost a pretty penny!⁶⁸ After that they will make all the German bishops cardinals, and then there will be nothing left.

Third, when a dispute has started at Rome over a benefice.⁶⁹ In my opinion this is the commonest and widest road to bring livings into the hands of Rome. Even when there is no dispute here, countless knaves will be found at Rome who will unearth a dispute and snatch the benefices at will. Thus many a good priest must lose his living or pay a sum of money to avoid having his benefice disputed. Such a living, rightly or wrongly contested, becomes the property of the Roman See forever. It would be no wonder if God would rain fire and brimstone from heaven and 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 for nothing else than for such gross wickedness and to protect and practice it? O noble princes and lords, how long will you leave your lands and your people naked and exposed to such ravening wolves?

⁶⁸ In 1513 Prince Albert of Brandenburg was made archbishop of Magdeburg. Later that same year he became administrator of Halberstadt. The following year he became archbishop of Mainz as well, and in 1518 was made a cardinal. The expenses attending this pluralism were defrayed by the sale of papal indulgences. Cf. *PE* 2, 88 n. 4.

⁶⁹ This rule is also mentioned in the Concordat of Vienna.

⁷⁰ I.e., although the dioceses bear foreign names, they are constituted by and originate in Rome.

⁷¹ The pallium is a woolen shoulder cape. It is the emblem of the archbishop’s office and must be secured from Rome. The bestowal of the pallium is a very ancient custom and was so referred to by Gregory I (590–604). Canon law prescribes that the

Since even these practices were not enough, and Avarice grew impatient at the long time it took to get hold of all the bishoprics, my Lord Avarice devised the fiction that the bishoprics should be nominally abroad but that their origin and foundation is at Rome.⁷⁰ Furthermore, no bishop can be confirmed unless he pays a huge sum for his pallium⁷¹ and binds himself with solemn oaths to the personal service of the pope.⁷² That explains why no bishop dares to act against the pope. That is what the Romanists were seeking when they imposed the oath. It also explains why all the richest bishoprics have fallen into debt and ruin. I am told that Mainz pays twenty thousand gulden.⁷³ That is the Romanists all over! To be sure, they decreed a long time ago in canon law that the pallium should be given without cost, that the number in the pope’s household be reduced, disputes⁷⁴ lessened, and the chapters and bishops allowed their liberty. But this did not bring in money. So they turned over a new leaf and have taken all authority away from the bishops and chapters. These sit there like ciphers, and have neither office nor authority nor work. Everything is controlled by those arch-villains at Rome, almost right down to the office of sexton and bell-ringer. Every dispute is called to Rome,⁷⁵ and everyone does just as he pleases, under cover of the pope’s authority.

What has happened in this very year? The bishop of Strassburg⁷⁶ wanted to govern his chapter properly and reform it in matters of worship. With this end in view he established certain godly and Christian regulations. But our dear friend the pope and the Holy Roman See wrecked and damned this holy and spiritual ordinance, all at the instigation of the priests. This is called feeding the sheep of

archbishop-elect must secure the pallium from Rome within three months of his election; otherwise he is forbidden to discharge the duties of his office. Luther’s contention that it was originally a free gift of good will is correct, as is his contention that the pallium (i.e., an archbishopric) was bought in his day at a fantastic price. Cf. *PE* 2, 89, n. 3; Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 91, n. 22.

⁷² An oath of allegiance to the pope was required before the pallium was conferred.

⁷³ Cf. p. 147, n. 68.

⁷⁴ I.e., the contesting of benefices.

⁷⁵ For adjudication.

⁷⁶ Wilhelm III, count of Honstein, was bishop from 1506 to 1541.

Christ!⁷⁷ That is how priests are strengthened against their own bishop, and how their disobedience to divine law is protected! Antichrist himself, I hope, will not dare to shame God so openly. There is your pope for you! Just as you have always wanted! Why did the pope do this? Ah! If one church were reformed that would be a dangerous breakthrough. Rome might have to follow suit. Therefore, it is better that no priest be allowed to get along with another and, as we have grown accustomed to seeing right up to the present day, that kings and princes should be set at odds. It is better to flood the world with Christian blood, lest the unity of Christians compel the Holy Roman See to reform itself!

So far we have been getting an idea of how they deal with benefices which become vacant and free. But for tenderhearted Avarice the free vacancies are too few. Therefore, he has kept a very close watch even on those benefices still occupied by their incumbents, so that these too can be made free, even though they are not now free. He does this in several ways.

First, Avarice lies in wait where fat prebends or bishoprics are held by an old or sick man, or even by one with an alleged disability. The Holy See gives a coadjutor, that is, an assistant, to an incumbent of this kind. This is done without the holder's consent or gratitude, and for the benefit of the coadjutor, because he is a member of the pope's "household," or because he has paid for it or has otherwise earned it by some sort of service to Rome. In this case the free rights of the chapter or the rights of the incumbent are disregarded, and the whole thing falls into the hands of Rome.

⁷⁷ Cf. John 21:15–17.

⁷⁸ The commendation of these benefices did not obligate the recipient to exercise the duties attached to the benefice. The result was that these benefices suffered from the absenteeism of those into whose charge they were commended. Even Duke George of Saxony, an opponent of the Reformation, complained before the Diet of Worms in 1521 that such commendations greatly depleted the resources of the benefices. Cf. *PE* 2, 91, n. 2; Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 92, n. 24.

⁷⁹ An apostate monk was one who left his monastery without permission and functioned as a secular priest (*MA* 2, 395). There were quite a few such monks in Luther's day. They wandered about from place to place, often wearing garb and exercising the rights and privileges reserved to their order. They were a nuisance to

Second, there is the little word "commend." This means the pope puts a cardinal, or another of his underlings, in charge of a rich, prosperous monastery,⁷⁸ just as if I were to give you a hundred gulden to keep. This does not mean to give the monastery or bestow it. Nor does it mean abolishing it or the divine service. It means quite simply to give it into his keeping. Not that he to whom it is entrusted is to care for it or build it up, but he is to drive out the incumbent, receive the goods and revenues, and install some apostate, renegade monk⁷⁹ or another, who accepts five or six gulden a year and sits all day long in the church selling pictures and images to the pilgrims, so that neither prayers nor masses are said in that place any more. 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 divine worship. He certainly does well at it! But this would be harsh language for Borne, so they have to call it a "commend," or a command to take over the charge of the monastery. The pope can make "commendations" of four or more of these monasteries in one year, any single one of which may have an income of more than six thousand gulden.⁸⁰ This is how the Romanists increase the worship of God and maintain the monasteries! Even the Germans are beginning to find that out!

Third, there are some benefices they call *incompatibilia*,⁸¹ which, according to the ordinances of canon law, cannot be held at the same time, such as two parishes, two bishoprics, and the like. In these cases the Holy Roman See of Avarice evades canon law by making glosses⁸² to its own advantage, called *unio* and *incorporatio*. This means that the pope incorporates many *incompatibilia* into one single unity, so that each is a part of every other and all of them together are looked upon

the resident clergy because they often disrupted parish life. Carafa, who later became Pope Paul IV (1555–1559), regarded them as a great menace. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 92, n. 25.

⁸⁰ Cf. p. 45, n. 18.

⁸¹ Offices which cannot be united in the hands of one man.

⁸² Glosses are more or less authoritative comments on canon law, which date from the time when the study of canon law became a part of the theological curriculum. Their chief aim is to show how the law applies to practical cases that may arise. The so-called *glossa ordinaria* in Luther's time had an authority almost equal to that of the *corpus iuris* itself. Cf. *PE* 2, 92, n. 3.

as one benefice. They are then no longer *incomptabilia*, and the holy canon law is satisfied because it is no longer binding, except upon those who do not buy these glosses from the pope or his *datarius*.⁸³ The *unio*, that is, the uniting, is very similar. The pope combines many such benefices like a bundle of sticks, and they are all regarded as one benefice. There is at present a certain court follower in Rome who alone holds twenty-two parishes, seven priories, as well as forty-four benefices.⁸⁴ All these are held by the help of that masterly gloss, which declares that this is not against canon law. What the cardinals and other prelates get out of it is anybody's guess. And this is the way the Germans are to have their purses emptied and their itch scratched.⁸⁵

Another of these glosses is the *administratio*. This means a man may hold, in addition to his bishopric, some abbacy or dignity⁸⁶ and all its emoluments, without having the title attached to it. He is simply called the "administrator."⁸⁷ At Rome it is sufficient to change a word or two but leave the actuality what it was before. It is as if I were to teach that we were now to call the brothel-keeper the mayor's wife. She still remains what she was before. This kind of Romish regime Peter foretold in 2 Peter 2[:1, 3], "False teachers will come who will deal with you in greed and lying words for their gain."

Our worthy Roman Avarice has devised another technique. He sells or disposes of livings on the condition that the vendor or disposer retains reversionary rights to them.⁸⁸ In that event, when the incumbent

dies the benefices automatically revert to him who had sold, disposed, or surrendered them in the first instance. In this way they have made hereditary property out of the benefices. Nobody else can come into possession of them except the man to whom the seller is willing to dispose of them, or to whom he bequeaths his rights at death. Besides, there are many who transfer to another the mere title to a benefice, but from which the titleholder does not draw a cent. Today, too, it has become an established custom to confer a benefice on a man while reserving a portion of the annual income for oneself.⁸⁹ This used to be called simony.⁹⁰ There are many more things of this sort than can be counted. They treat benefices more shamefully than the heathen soldiers treated Christ's clothes at the foot of the cross.⁹¹

But all that has been said up till now has been going on for so long that it has become established custom. Yet Avarice has devised one more thing, which I hope may be his last and choke him. The pope has a noble little device called *pectoralis reservatio*, meaning mental reservation, and *proprius motus*, meaning the arbitrary will of his authority.⁹² It goes like this. A certain man goes to Rome and succeeds in procuring a benefice. It is duly signed and sealed in the customary manner. Then another candidate comes along, who brings money or else has rendered services to the pope, which we shall not mention here, and desires the same benefice of the pope. The pope then gives it to him and takes it away from the other.⁹³ If anybody complains that

⁸³ The papal bureau that granted dispensations and was responsible for the issuing, registration, and dating (hence the name) of papal appointments. A fee had to be paid for the services of this bureau. Its headquarters were in a splendid building near St. Peter's.

⁸⁴ Jacobs cites the example of two such court followers, Johannes Zink and Johannes Ingenwinkel. Between 1513 and 1521 Zink received fifty-six appointments. Ingenwinkel received one hundred six appointments between 1496 and 1521. Cf. *PE* 2, 93, n. 3.

⁸⁵ I.e., have their pride deflated.

⁸⁶ Cf. p. 147, n. 68.

⁸⁷ Cardinal Albrecht of Mainz also had the title of "administrator" of Halberstadt. Cf. *PE* 2, 93, n. 5.

⁸⁸ The name of the practice was "regression" (*regressus*). Cf. *PE* 2, 94, n. 1.

⁸⁹ The complaint was made at Worms in 1521 that it was impossible for a German to secure a clear title to a benefice from Rome unless he applied for it in the name of an Italian who demanded a lump sum, a yearly pension, or a percentage of the income in return for the use of his name.

⁹⁰ Simony (Acts 8:18–20) is the ecclesiastical name for the buying or procuring of an office in the church for money, favor, or any consideration or reward. In the primitive and earlier medieval church such activity invalidated the appointment and brought shame and punishment upon the perpetrator (*PE* 2, 94, n. 3). Aeneas Sylvius, who became Pope Pius II in 1458, complained that there was nothing which could not be had at Rome for money (Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 94, n. 30).

⁹¹ Cf. Matt. 27:35.

⁹² The canonists taught that in theory the pope ultimately held all rights of appointment. This right could be exercised *per petitionem alterius*, i.e., by confirming the election or appointment by others, or by the pope's own right, *proprio motu*. Countless disputes arose and all sorts of agreements were arrived at, e.g., the "papal months," in which the pope invariably had the right of appointment (see p. 145, n. 61). Any given case could, of course, be made an exception, if the canonists' theory is supported, and in these cases the matter was "reserved in the heart of the pope," and the appointment then made "on his own motion." Cf. *PE* 2, 94, n. 4.

⁹³ An instance of this giving and taking back was cited at Worms in 1521.

this is not right, then the Most Holy Father has to find some excuse lest he be accused of a flagrant violation of the [canon] law. He then says that he had mentally reserved that particular benefice to himself and had retained full rights of disposal over it, although he had neither given it a thought in his life nor even heard of it. In this way he has now found his usual little gloss. As pope he can tell lies, deceive, and make everybody look like a fool. And all this he does openly and unashamedly. And yet he still wants to be the head of Christendom, but lets himself be ruled by the evil spirit in obvious lies.

The arbitrary and deceptive reservation of the pope only creates a state of affairs in Rome that defies description. There is buying, selling, bartering, changing, trading, drunkenness, lying, deceiving, robbing, stealing, luxury, harlotry, knavery, and every sort of contempt of God. Even the rule of the Antichrist could not be more scandalous. Venice, Antwerp, and Cairo have nothing on this fair at Rome and all that goes on there.⁹⁴ In these places there is still some regard for right and reason, but in Rome the devil himself is in charge. And out of this sea the same kind of morality flows into all the world. Is it any wonder that people like this are terrified of reformation and of a free council, and prefer rather to set all the kings and princes at enmity lest in their unity they should call a council? Who could bear to have such villainy brought to light?

Finally, the pope has built his own store for all this noble commerce, that is, the house of the *datarius* in Rome.⁹⁵ All who deal in benefices and livings must go there. Here they have to buy their glosses, and transact their business, and get authority to practice such arch-knavery. There was a time when Rome was still gracious. In those days people had to buy justice or suppress it with money. But Rome has become so expensive today that it allows no one to practice knavery unless he has

⁹⁴ These ports were the three great commercial centers of foreign trade in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their annual fairs brought the merchants together to transact their wholesale trade. The three cities were notorious. Cf. *PE* 2, 95, n. 2.

⁹⁵ See p. 151, n. 83.

⁹⁶ I.e., has to buy exemptions from the provisions of canon law in the form of dispensations.

first bought the right to do so. If that is not a brothel above all imaginable brothels, then I do not know what brothels are.

If you have money in this establishment you can obtain all these things we have just discussed. Indeed, not just these! Here usury becomes honest money, the possession of property acquired by theft or robbery is legalized. Here vows are dissolved; monks are granted liberty to leave their orders. Here marriage is on sale to the clergy. Here bastards can be legitimized. Here all dishonor and shame can be made to look like honor and glory. Here every kind of iniquity and evil is knighted or raised to nobility. Here marriage is permitted which is within the prohibited relationships or otherwise forbidden. O what assessing and fleecing goes on there! It seems as though canon law were instituted solely for the purpose of making a great deal of money. Whoever would be a Christian has to buy his way out of its provisions.⁹⁶ In fact, here the devil becomes a saint, and a god as well. What cannot be done anywhere else in heaven or on earth, can be done in this place. They call these things *compositiones*! Compositions indeed! Better named confusions.⁹⁷ They put nothing together, but break everything all up! Compared with the exactions of this bureau, the Rhine toll⁹⁸ is but a drop in the bucket.

Let no one accuse me of exaggeration. It is all so open that even in Rome they have to admit that the state of affairs is more revolting and worse than anyone can say. I have not yet stirred the real hellish broth of their personal vices—nor do I want to. I speak only of general, current matters, and still words fail me. The bishops, priests, and above all the doctors in the universities ought to have done their duty and with common accord written against such goings-on and cried out against them. This is what they are paid to do! Just turn the page over, and then you'll find out.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ The fees paid for the procurement of dispensations were called *compositiones*. Luther makes a play on the Latin words *compositiones* and *confusiones* (confusions). Cf. *WA* 6, 426, n. 1.

⁹⁸ The Rhine toll was a toll levied by the “robber barons” on the Rhine castles on all merchants who passed through their domains.

⁹⁹ *Ja, wend das blat umb, so findistu es.* Cf. *CL* 1, 383, which interprets this obscure expression to mean that the opposite is the case. Jacobs translates it, “but they have done the very opposite.” *PE* 2, 97.

One final word remains, and I am bound to say it. Since this boundless Avarice is not satisfied with all this wealth, wealth with which three great kings would be content, he now begins to transfer this trade and sell it to the Fuggers of Augsburg.¹⁰⁰ The lending, trading, and buying of bishoprics and benefices, and the commerce in ecclesiastical holdings, have now come to the right place. Now spiritual and secular goods have become one. I would now like to hear of somebody clever enough to imagine what Roman Avarice could do more than what it has already done, unless perhaps Fugger were to transfer or sell this present combination of two lines of business to somebody else. I really think it has just reached the limit.

As for what they have stolen in all lands, and still steal and extort, through indulgences, bulls, letters of confession,¹⁰¹ butter letters,¹⁰² and other *confessionalia*¹⁰³—all this is just patchwork. It is like casting one devil into hell. Not that these bring in little money, for a powerful king could well support himself on such proceeds, but it is not to be compared with the streams of treasure referred to above. I shall say nothing at present about where this indulgence money has gone. I shall have more to say about that later. The Campoflore¹⁰⁴ and the Belvindere¹⁰⁵ and certain other places probably know something about that.

Since, then, such devilish rule is not only barefaced robbery, deceit, and the tyranny of hell's portals, but ruinous to the body and soul of Christendom, it is our duty to exercise all diligence to protect Christendom from such misery and destruction. If we want to fight

against the Turks, let us begin here where they are worst of all. If we are right in hanging thieves and beheading robbers, why should we let Roman Avarice go free? He is the worst thief and robber that has ever been or could ever come into the world, and all in the holy name of Christ and St. Peter! Who can put up with it a moment longer and say nothing? Almost everything Avarice possesses has been gotten by theft and robbery. It has never been otherwise, as all the history books prove. The pope never purchased such extensive holdings that the income from his *officia*¹⁰⁶ should amount to one million ducats, over and above the gold mines we have just been discussing and the income from his lands. Nor did Christ and St. Peter bequeath it to him. Neither has anyone given or lent it to him. Neither is it his by virtue of ancient rights or usage. Tell me, then, from what source he could have got it? Learn a lesson from this, and watch carefully what they are after and what they say when they send out their legates to collect money to fight the Turks.

Now, although I am too insignificant a man to make propositions for the improvement of this dreadful state of affairs, nevertheless I shall sing my fool's song through to the end and say, so far as I am able, what could and should be done, either by the temporal authority or by a general council.

1. Every prince, every noble, every city should henceforth forbid their subjects to pay annates to Rome and should abolish them entirely. The pope has broken the agreement and made the annates a robbery to the injury and shame of the whole German nation. He gives them to

¹⁰⁰ The Fuggers were the greatest international bankers of the sixteenth century and bankers to the curia. They were zealous Romanists and supported Eck against Luther. Their control of large amounts of capital enabled them to advance large sums of money to the territorial rulers. In return they received monopolistic concessions. The spiritual lords as well as the secular lords availed themselves of the services of this accommodating firm. They were the pope's financial representative in Germany, and made the financial arrangements between the pope and Albrecht of Mainz which occasioned the indulgence controversy of 1517. Cf. *PE* 2, 97, n. 5.

¹⁰¹ Certificates which entitled the holder to choose his own confessor and authorized the confessor to absolve him from certain classes of "reserved" sins.

¹⁰² The *Butterbriefe* were dispensations alleviating the severity of fasts by permitting the eating of eggs and milk products. Such dispensations date back to 1338. Cf. Henry Charles Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church* (Philadelphia, Lea Brothers & Co., 1896), III, 192 ff.

¹⁰³ *Confessionalia* is used here in the broad sense, and means dispensations of all sorts, including those relating to penance. Cf. *PE* 2, 98, n. 3.

¹⁰⁴ The Campo di Fiore, a Roman marketplace, was restored and adorned at great expense by Eugene IV (1431–1447) and his successors. It was here that Pope Alexander VI accidentally took the poisoned drink intended for a cardinal. See Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 95, n. 35.

¹⁰⁵ 105 A part of the Vatican palace notorious as the banquet hall of Alexander (1492–1503). Julius II (1503–1513) turned it into a collection of ancient works of art. Luther is hinting that the indulgence money is spent on these and similar objects and not for the church. Cf. *PE* 2, 98, n. 6; cf. also *CL* 1, 384, n. 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Officia* were the host of positions which could be bought for fixed prices and which had substantial incomes. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 95, n. 36.

his friends, sells them for huge sums of money, and uses them to endow offices. In so doing he has lost his right to them and deserves punishment. Consequently the temporal authority is under obligation to protect the innocent and prevent injustice, as Paul teaches in Romans 13, and St. Peter in 1 Peter 2[:14], and even the canon law in Case 16, Question 7, in the *de filiis* clause.¹⁰⁷ Thus it has come about that they say to the pope and his crowd, “*Tu ora*, thou shalt pray”; to the emperor and his servants, “*Tu protege*, thou shalt protect”; to the common man, “*Tu labora*, thou shalt work,” not however as though everyone were not to pray, protect, and work. For the man who is diligent in his work prays, protects, and works in all that he does. But everyone should have his own special work assigned him.

2. Since the pope with his Romanist practices—his commendations, coadjutors, reservations, *gratiae expectativae*,¹⁰⁸ papal months, incorporations, unions, pensions, pallia, chancery rules, and such knavery¹⁰⁹—usurps for himself all the German foundations without authority and right, and gives and sells them to foreigners at Rome who do nothing for Germany in return, and since he robs the local bishops of their rights and makes mere ciphers and dummies of them, and thereby acts contrary to his own canon law, common sense, and reason, it has finally reached the point where the livings and benefices are sold to coarse, unlettered asses and ignorant knaves at Rome out of sheer greed. Pious and learned people do not benefit from the service or skill of these fellows. Consequently the poor German people must go without competent and learned prelates and go from bad to worse.

For this reason the Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom for the salvation of the poor souls who perish because of this tyranny. The Christian nobility should ordain, order, and decree that henceforth no further benefice shall be drawn into the hands of Rome, and that

¹⁰⁷ Luther errs here. The clause is not *de filiis*, but *Filiis vel nepotibus*. The clause provides that in case the income from 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 wants to apply this same principle to the annates. Cf. *PE* 2, 99, n. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Promises to bestow livings not yet vacant. Complaints of the evils arising out of the practice were heard continually after 1416, and were made at Worms in 1521. Cf. *PE* 2, 100, n. 4.

hereafter no appointment shall be obtained there in any manner whatsoever, but that the benefices should be dragged from this tyrannical authority and kept out of his reach. The nobility should restore to the local bishops their right and responsibility to administer the benefices in the German nation to the best of their ability. And when a lackey comes along from Rome he should be given a strict order to keep out, to jump into the Rhine or the nearest river, and give the Romish ban with all its seals and letters a nice, cool dip. If this happened they would sit up and take notice in Rome. They would not think that the Germans are always dull and drunk, but have really become Christian again. They would realize that the Germans do not intend to permit the holy name of Christ, in whose name all this knavery and destruction of souls goes on, to be scoffed and scorned any longer, and that they have more regard for God’s honor than for the authority of men.

3. An imperial law should be issued that no bishop’s cloak¹¹⁰ and no confirmation of any dignity whatsoever shall henceforth be secured from Rome, but that the ordinance of the most holy and famous Council of Nicaea¹¹¹ be restored. This ordinance decreed that a bishop shall be confirmed by the two nearest bishops or by the archbishop. If the pope breaks the statutes of this and of all other councils, what is the use of holding councils? Who has given him the authority to despise the decisions of councils and tear them to shreds like this?

This is all the more reason for us to depose all bishops, archbishops, and primates and make ordinary parsons of them, with only the pope as their superior, as he now is. The pope allows no proper authority or responsibility to the bishops, archbishops, and primates. He usurps everything for himself and lets them keep only the name and the empty title. It has even gone so far that by papal exemption¹¹² the monasteries, abbots, and prelates as well are excepted from the regular

¹⁰⁹ These items are discussed in the preceding paragraphs, beginning on p. 141.

¹¹⁰ The pallium.

¹¹¹ Luther refers to canon 4 of this council. Cf. *PE* 2, 101, n. 3.

¹¹² “Exemption” was the practice by which monastic houses were withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the bishops and made directly subject to the pope. Apparently the practice originated in the tenth century with the famous monastery of Cluny, but it was almost universal in the case of the houses of the mendicant orders. It was a constant subject of complaint by the bishops, and the Fifth Lateran Council

authority of the bishops. Consequently there is no longer any order in Christendom. The inevitable result of all this is what has happened already: relaxation of punishment, and license to do evil all over the world. I certainly fear that the pope may properly be called “the man of sin” [2 Thess. 2:3]. Who but the pope can be blamed for there being no discipline, no punishment, no rule, no order in Christendom? By his usurpation of power he ties the prelates’ hands and takes away their rod of discipline. He opens his hands to all those set under him, and gives away or sells their release.¹¹³

Lest the pope complain that he is being robbed of his authority, it should be decreed that in those cases where the primates or the archbishops are unable to settle a case, or when a dispute arises between them, then the matter should be laid before the pope, but not every little thing. It was done this way in former times, and this was the way the famous Council of Nicaea¹¹⁴ decreed. Whatever can be settled without the pope, then, should be so settled so that his holiness is not burdened with such minor matters, but gives himself to prayer, study, and the care of all Christendom. This is what he claims to do. This is what the apostles did. They said in Acts 6[:2–4], “It is not right that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables, but we will hold to preaching and prayer, and set others over that work.” But now Rome stands for nothing else than the despising of the gospel and prayer, and for the serving of tables, that is, temporal things. The ride of the apostles and of the pope have as much in common as Christ has with Lucifer, heaven with hell, night with day. Yet the pope is called “Vicar of Christ” and “Successor to the Apostles.”

4. It should be decreed that no temporal matter is to be referred to Rome, but that all such cases shall be left to the temporal authority, as the Romanists themselves prescribe in that canon law of theirs, which

passed a decree (1516) abolishing all monastic exemptions. This decree seems not to have been effective. Cf. *PE* 2, 102, n. 1. Cf. also the fuller explanation in Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 97, n. 42.

¹¹³ I.e., release from their lawful superiors.

¹¹⁴ A reference to canon 5 of the Council of Sardica (343), which was later incorporated in canon law as a canon of Nicaea. Cf. *PE* 2, 102, n. 4.

¹¹⁵ The complaint against these judges was that they assumed jurisdiction over cases which belonged in the secular courts and enforced their decision through

they do not observe. It should be the pope’s duty to be the most learned in the Scriptures and the holiest (not in the name only but in fact) and to regulate matters which concern the faith and holy life of Christians. He should hold the primates and archbishops to this task, and help them in dealing with these matters and taking care of these responsibilities. This is what St. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 6[:7], and he takes the Corinthians severely to task for their concern with worldly things. That such matters are dealt with in Rome causes unbearable grief in every land. It increases the costs, and, moreover, these judges do not know the usage, laws, and customs of these lands, so that they often do violence to the facts and base their decisions on their own laws and precedents. As a result the contesting parties often suffer injustice.

In addition, the horrible extortion practiced by the judges in the bishops’ courts¹¹⁵ must be forbidden in every diocese so that they no longer judge anything except matters of faith and morals, and leave matters of money and property, life and honor, to the temporal judges. The temporal authorities, therefore, should not permit sentences of excommunication and exile to be passed where faith and morality are not involved. Spiritual authorities should rule over matters which are spiritual; this is just a matter of common sense. But spiritual matters are not money or material things; they are faith and good works.

Nevertheless, it might be granted that cases concerning benefices or livings be tried before bishops, archbishops, and primates. Therefore, to settle disputes and disagreements, it might be possible for the primate of Germany to hold a general consistory court with its auditors and chancellors.¹¹⁶ This court should have control of the *signaturae gratiae* and *signaturae justitiae*,¹¹⁷ which are now controlled at Rome, and to this court of appeal the cases in Germany would normally be

ecclesiastical censure. The *Gravamina* of 1521 specify the charges against these episcopal courts. Cf. *PE* 2, 103, n. 2.

¹¹⁶ This idea is not original with Luther. Jakob Wimpheling, the Alsatian-born humanist and German patriot, had made just such a suggestion to the emperor in 1510. Its effect would have been substantial independence of the German church from Roman control. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 98, n. 45.

¹¹⁷ The *signaturae gratiae* and the *signaturae justitiae* were the bureaus through which the pope regulated those matters of administration which belonged to his own special prerogative. Cf. *PE* 2, 104, n. 1.

brought and tried. These courts ought not to be paid for by chance presents and gifts, as is the practice at Rome, by which they have grown accustomed to selling justice and injustice. They are forced to do this at Rome because the pope does not pay them a salary, but lets them grow fat from gifts. The fact is that at Rome no one bothers now about what is right or wrong, only about what is money and what is not. This court, however, might be paid from the annates, or in some other way devised by those who are more clever and more experienced in these things than I. All I seek to do is to arouse and set to thinking those who have the ability and inclination to help the German nation to be free and Christian again after the wretched, heathenish, and un-Christian rule of the pope.

5. Reservations should no longer be valid, and no more benefices should be seized by Rome, even if the incumbent dies, or there is a dispute, or even if the incumbent is a member of the pope's household or on the staff of a cardinal. And it must be strictly forbidden and prevented for any member of the papal court to contest any benefice whatsoever, to summon pious priests to court, harass them, or force them into lawsuits. If, in consequence of this prohibition, any ban or ecclesiastical pressure should come from Rome, it should be disregarded, just as though a thief were to put a man under the ban because he would not let him steal. Indeed, they should be severely punished for blasphemous misuse of the ban and the divine name to strengthen their hand at robbery. They want to drive us with their threats, which are only lies and fabrications, to file point where we put up with, yes, even praise, such blasphemy of God's name and such abuse of spiritual authority. They want to force us to be partakers in their rascality in the sight of God. We are responsible before God to oppose them, as St. Paul in Romans 1[:32] reproves as worthy of death not only those who do such things, but also those who approve and permit them to be done. Most unbearable of all is the lying *reservatio pectoralis*,¹¹⁸ whereby Christendom is so scandalously and openly put

¹¹⁸ Cf. p. 152, n. 92.

¹¹⁹ Those cases in which a priest was forbidden to give absolution. Luther means specifically those cases in which only the pope could absolve.

¹²⁰ This papal bull was published annually on Maundy Thursday until the middle of the eighteenth century. It was directed against heretics, but to the condemnation of the heretics and their heresies was added a list of offenses for which absolution could

to shame and scorn because its head deals with open lies and for filthy lucre unashamedly deceives and fools everybody.

6. The *casus reservati*,¹¹⁹ reserved cases, should also be abolished. They are not only the means of extorting much money from the people, but by means of them the ruthless tyrants ensnare and confuse many tender consciences, intolerably injuring their faith in God. This is especially true of the ridiculous, childish cases they make such a fuss about in the bull *Coena Domini*,¹²⁰ sins which should not even be called everyday sins, much less so great that the pope cannot remit them by indulgence. Examples of these sins are hindering a pilgrim on his way to Rome, supplying weapons to the Turk, or counterfeiting papal letters.¹²¹ They make fools of us with such crude, silly, clumsy goings-on! Sodom and Gomorrah, and all those sins which are or may be committed against the commandments of God, are not reserved cases. But what God has never commanded, what they themselves have imagined—these must be reserved cases. The only reason for all this is to make sure that no one will be prevented from bringing money to Rome, so that the Romanists may live in the lap of luxury, safe from the Turks, and by their wanton, worthless bulls and letters keep the world subjected to their tyranny.

Every priest simply ought to know, and a decree publicly made, that no secret, undenounced sin constitutes a reserved case; and that every priest has the power to remit every sin no matter what it is. Where sins are secret, neither abbot, bishop, nor pope has the power to reserve one to himself. If they did that, their action would be null and void. They ought even to be punished as men who without any right at all presume to make judgments in God's stead, and thereby ensnare and burden poor and ignorant consciences. In those cases, however, where open and notorious sins are committed, especially sins against God's commandment, then there are indeed grounds 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 did not set tyrants

be gotten only from the pope or by his authorization. Luther's name was added to the list of heretics after his excommunication. Cf. *PE* 2, 105, n. 4.

¹²¹ The brief or letter is a papal decree of equal authority with the bull, but differing from it in form and usually dealing with matters of lesser importance. Cf. *PE* 2, 106, n. 1.

in his church, but shepherds, as Peter said in the last chapter of his first epistle [1 Pet. 5:2–3].

7. The Roman See should do away with the *officia*,¹²² and cut down the creeping, crawling swarm of vermin at Rome, so that the pope's household can be supported out of the pope's own pocket. The pope should not allow his court to surpass the courts of all kings in pomp and extravagance, because this kind of thing not only has never been of any use to the cause of the Christian faith, but has kept the courtesans from study and prayer until they are hardly able to speak about the faith at all. This they proved quite flagrantly at this last Roman council,¹²³ in which, among 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 unless he wants to lose his benefice. How can the affairs of Christendom and matters of faith be settled by men who are hardened and blinded by gross avarice, wealth, and worldly splendor, and who now for the first time decree that the soul is immortal? It is no small shame to the whole of Christendom that they deal so disgracefully with the faith at Rome. If they had less wealth and pomp, they could pray and study more diligently to be worthy and diligent in dealing with matters of faith, as was the case in ancient times when bishops did not presume to be the kings of kings.

8. The harsh and terrible oaths which the bishops are wrongfully compelled to swear to the pope should be abolished. These oaths bind the bishops like servants, and are decreed in that arbitrary, stupid, worthless, and unlearned chapter, *Significasti*.¹²⁴ Is it not enough that they burden us in body, soul, and property with their countless foolish laws by which they weaken faith and waste Christendom, without also

¹²² See p. 156, n. 106.

¹²³ The Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517). Convened by Pope Julius II, the main item on the agenda was the reformation of the church. Among the subjects under discussion were the authority of the council in relation to that of the pope; the reformation of religious orders; the decadence and reform of the church itself; reformation of the state; and heresy.

¹²⁴ *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX*, lib. i, tit. VI, C. IV (*CIC* 2, cols. 49–50). This chapter forbids the bestowing of the pallium on an archbishop-elect until he first shall have sworn allegiance to the Holy See.

¹²⁵ Investiture was the ceremony of inducting church officials into offices to which revenues and the exercise of certain temporal powers were attached. The right to appoint and invest these officials afforded frequent occasion for controversy

making a prisoner of the bishop both as a person as well as in his office and function? In addition, they have also assumed the investiture,¹²⁵ which in ancient times was the right of the German emperor, and in France and other countries investiture still belongs to the king. They had great wars and disputes with the emperors about this matter until finally they had the brazen effrontery to take it over, and have held it until now; just as though the Germans more than all other Christians on earth had to be the country bumpkins of the pope and the Romanist See and do and put up with what no one else will either put up with or do. Since this is sheer robbery and violence, hinders the regular authority of the bishop, and injures poor souls, the emperor and his nobles are duty-bound to prevent and punish such tyranny.

9. The pope should have no authority over the emperor, except the right to anoint and crown him at the altar just as a bishop crowns a king.¹²⁶ We should never again yield to that devilish pride which requires the emperor to kiss the pope's feet, or sit at his feet, or, as they say, hold his stirrup or the bridle of his mule when he mounts to go riding. Still less should he do homage and swear faithful allegiance to the pope as the popes brazenly demand as though they had a right to it. The chapter *Solite*,¹²⁷ which sets papal authority above imperial authority, is not worth a cent,¹²⁸ and the same goes for all those who base their authority on it or pay any deference to it. For it does nothing else than force the holy words of God, and wrest them out of their true

between pope and emperor in the Middle Ages. The outstanding controversy was that between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV in 1075. The Concordat of Worms (1122) ended the struggle by providing that the election of bishops and abbots be conducted according to the law of the church, but under imperial supervision; that the pope invest appointees with staff and ring; and that the emperor invest them with temporal authority by a touch of his scepter.

¹²⁶ Since the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 the German Empire had been regarded as the continuation of the Roman Empire, a fiction fostered by the popes. The right to crown an emperor was held to be the prerogative of the pope. Cf. *PE* 2, 108, n. 2.

¹²⁷ *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX*, lib. i, tit. XXXIII, C. VI. *CIC* 2, col. 196.

¹²⁸ *Heller*, a coin of little value.

meaning to conform to their own fond imaginations, as I have shown in a Latin treatise.¹²⁹

This most extreme, arrogant, and wanton presumption of the pope has been devised by the devil, who under cover of this intends to usher in the Antichrist and raise the pope above God, as many are now doing and even have already done. It is not proper for the pope to exalt himself above the temporal authorities, except in spiritual offices such as preaching and giving absolution. In other matters the pope is subject to the crown, as Paul and Peter teach in Romans 13[:1–7] and 1 Peter 2[:13], and as I have explained above.¹³⁰

The pope is not a vicar of Christ in heaven, but only of Christ as he walked the earth. Christ in heaven, in the form of a ruler, needs no vicar, but sits on his throne and sees everything, does everything, knows everything, and has all power. But Christ needs a vicar in the form of a servant, the form in which he went about on earth, working, preaching, suffering, and dying. Now the Romanists turn all that upside down. They take the heavenly and kingly form from Christ and give it to the pope, and leave the form of a servant to perish completely. He might almost be the Counter-Christ, whom the Scriptures call Antichrist,¹³¹ for all his nature, work, and pretensions run counter to Christ and only blot out Christ's nature and destroy his work.

It is also ridiculous and childish for the pope, on the basis of such perverted and deluded reasoning, to claim in his decretal *Pastoralis*¹³² that he is rightful heir to the empire in the event of a vacancy. Who has given him this right? Was it Christ when he said, "The princes of the Gentiles are lords, but it shall not be so among you" [Luke 22:25–26]?

¹²⁹ *On the Power of the Pope (de potestate papae)* (1520). WA 2. 217.

¹³⁰ Cf. pp. 129–130.

¹³¹ Cf. p. 133, n. 30.

¹³² A decree of Pope Clement V issued in 1313 and subsequently incorporated into canon law in *Clementinarum*, lib. ii, tit. XI, C. II. *CIC* 2, cols. 1151–1158.

¹³³ This document purported to be the testament of Emperor Constantine (306–337). It conveyed to the pope title to the city of Rome, certain lands in Italy, and "the islands of the sea." Medieval pontiffs used the document to support their claims to temporal power. In 1440 Laurentius Valla, an Italian humanist, exposed the *Donation* as an eighth-century forgery. Ulrich von Hutten's 1517 republication of Valla's exposé came to Luther's attention just before he wrote the present treatise.

Or did Peter bequeath it to him? It makes me angry that we have to read and learn such shameless, gross, and idiotic lies in the canon law, and must even hold them as Christian doctrine when they are devilish lies.

That impossible lie, the *Donation of Constantine*,¹³³ is the same sort of thing. It must have been some special plague from God that so many intelligent people have let themselves be talked into accepting such lies. They are so crude and clumsy that I should imagine any drunken peasant could lie more adroitly and skilfully. How can a man rule and at the same time preach, pray, study, and care for the poor? Yet these are the duties which most properly and peculiarly belong to the pope, and they were so earnestly imposed by Christ that he even forbade his disciples to take cloak or money with them [Matt. 10:9–10]. Christ commanded this because it is almost impossible for anybody to fulfil these duties if they have to look after one single household. Yet the pope would rule an empire and still remain pope. This is what those rogues have thought up who, under the cover of the pope's name, would like to be lords of the world and would gladly restore the Roman Empire to its former state through the pope and in the name of Christ.

10. The pope should restrain himself, take his fingers out of the pie, and claim no title to the kingdom of Naples and Sicily.¹³⁴ He has exactly as much right to that kingdom as I have, and yet he wants to be its overlord. It is property gotten by robbery and violence, like almost all his other possessions. The emperor, therefore, should not grant him this realm, and where it has been granted, he should no longer give his consent. Instead, he should draw the pope's attention to the Bible and the prayer book, that he preach and pray and leave the government of

Luther published an annotated translation of the *Donation* in 1537. WA 50, 60–89. Cf. *PE* 2, 109, n. 4.

¹³⁴ The papal claim to sovereignty over this little kingdom, which comprised the island of Sicily and certain territories in southern Italy, goes back to the eleventh century. This claim was steadily asserted during the later Middle Ages and was one of the issues in the conflict between Emperor Frederick II (1200–1260) and the popes. The popes claimed the right to award the kingdom to a ruler who would swear allegiance to the Holy See. At the time Luther wrote this treatise, sovereignty over this kingdom was contested by the royal houses of France and of Spain, of which latter house Charles V was head. Cf. *PE* 2, 110, n. 1.

lands and people—especially those that no one has given to him—to the temporal lords.

The same goes for Bologna, Imola, Vicenza, Ravenna, and all the territories in the March of Ancona, Romagna, and other lands which the pope has seized by force and possesses without right.¹³⁵ Moreover, the pope has meddled in these things against every express command of Christ and St. Paul. For as St. Paul says, “No one should be entangled in worldly affairs who should tend to being a soldier of God.”¹³⁶ Now the pope should be the head and chief of these soldiers, and yet he meddles in worldly affairs more than any emperor or king. We have to pull him out of these affairs and let him tend to being a soldier. Even Christ, whose vicar the pope boasts he is, was never willing to have anything to do with temporal rule. In fact, when somebody sought a judgment from him in the matter of a brother’s action, he said to that man, “Who made me a judge over you?” [Luke 12:14]. But the pope rushes in without invitation and boldly takes hold of everything as if he were a god, until he no longer knows who Christ is, whose vicar he pretends to be.

11. Further, the kissing of the pope’s feet should cease.¹³⁷ It is an un-Christian, indeed, an anti-Christian 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 the pope not do the same to others in honor of their holiness? Compare them with

¹³⁵ At the time Luther wrote the present work (1520), the pope claimed the right and authority to rule over large areas of land. Luther maintained that temporal government was solely the concern of temporal, not spiritual, leaders. Behind this papal claim lay a thousand years of history. When the administrative system of the western half of the Roman Empire collapsed in the fifth century, the sole surviving authority was the papacy. By the end of the sixth century the Roman See was in possession of large areas of Italy and Sicily. The responsibility for these territories involved not only administration but sometimes even war.

In 752 Pope Stephen II appealed to the Franks for military assistance against the Lombards. As a result of that engagement the exarchate of Ravenna was given to the papacy (754). It was this so-called donation of Pepin the Frank which was the origin of the Papal States. The fiction of the *Donation of Constantine* encouraged the growth of a mystique around P pin’s gift.

In 1115 Countess Matilda of Tuscany bestowed Southern Tuscany upon Pope Gregory VIII. There were other extensive donations of territory, and the papacy’s sovereignty was upheld by the power of the Hapsburgs.

each other—Christ and the pope. Christ washed his disciples’ feet and dried them but the disciples never washed his feet [John 13:4–16]. The pope, as though he were higher than Christ, turns that about, and allows his feet to be kissed as a great favor. Though properly, if anyone wanted to do so, the pope ought to use all his power to prevent it, as did St. Paul and Barnabas, who would not let the people of Lystra pay them divine honor, but said, “We are men like you” [Acts 14:15]. But our flatterers have gone so far as to make an idol [of the pope] for us, so that no one fears or honors God as much as he fears and honors the pope. They will stand for that, but not for diminishing the pope’s majesty by so much as a hairsbreadth. If they were only Christian and esteemed God’s honor more than their own, the pope would never be happy to see God’s honor despised and his own exalted. Nor would he let anyone honor him until he saw that God’s honor was once more exalted and raised higher than his own.

Another example¹³⁸ of the same scandalous pride is that the pope is not satisfied to ride or be driven, but, although he is strong and in good health, he has himself borne by men like an idol and with unheard-of splendor. Dear readers, how does such satanic pride compare with Christ, who went on foot, as did all his disciples? Where has there ever been a worldly monarch who went about in such worldly pomp and glory as he who wants to be the head of all those who ought to despise and flee from the pomp and vanity of this world, that is, the Christians? Not that we should bother ourselves very much about him

During the fourteenth century desperate confusion arose as the result of the “Babylonian Captivity” of the papacy and of the Great Schism. Popes Alexander VI (1492–1503) and Julius II (1503–1513) became involved in war and political alliances. In 1527 during the pontificate of Clement VII, Rome itself was sacked by the emperor’s forces. By the nineteenth century the Papal States were reduced to the Patrimony of St. Peter, a tiny area in and around Rome. Under the terms of the Lateran Treaty of 1929 the papacy gave up claim to all sovereignty except in Vatican City. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 100. n. 57, and *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, Robert Appleton Co.), XIV (1912), 257–268.

¹³⁶ The passage is a free rendering of the Vulgate version of 2 Tim. 2:4.

¹³⁷ Cf. p. 164, n. 125.

¹³⁸ The remainder of this eleventh section was not included in the first edition.

Along with two other passages indicated in footnotes to the present edition, it was included in the second edition, published very soon after the first. Cf. *WA* 6, 397; 436, n. 10; *PE* 2, 59; and *CL* 1,421–422.

as a person, but we certainly ought to fear the wrath of God if we flatter this sort of pride and do not show our indignation. It is enough for the pope to rant and play the fool in this way. But it is more than enough for us to approve of it and let it go on.

What Christian heart can or ought to take pleasure in seeing that when the pope wishes to receive communion, he sits quietly like a gracious lord and has the sacrament brought to him on a golden rod by a bowing cardinal on bended knee? As though the holy sacrament were not worthy enough for the pope, a poor, stinking sinner, to rise and show respect to his God, when all other Christians, who are much holier than the Most Holy Father the pope, receive it with all due reverence! Would it be a wonder if God sent down a plague upon us all because we tolerate such dishonor of God by our prelates and praise them for doing it, and because we share in this damnable pride by our silence or by our flattery?

It is the same when the pope carries the sacrament in procession. He must be carried, but the sacrament is set before him like a flagon of wine on a table. At Rome Christ counts for nothing, but the pope counts for everything. And yet the Romanists want to compel us—and even use threats—to approve, praise, and honor these sins of the Antichrist, even though they are against God and all Christian doctrine. Help us, O God, to get a free, general council which will teach the pope that he, too, is a man, and not more than God, as he sets himself up to be!

12. Pilgrimages to Rome should either be abolished or else no one should be allowed to make such a pilgrimage for reasons of curiosity or his own pious devotion, unless it is first acknowledged by his parish

¹³⁹ There were other famous shrines, but the holy places at Rome had long been favorite destinations of pilgrimages, and this practice had been zealously fostered by the popes through the institution of the “golden” or “jubilee” years. Cf. p. 171, n. 142.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Ulrich von Hutten’s remark in *Vadiscus*, “Three things there are which those who go to Rome usually bring back with them: a bad conscience, a ruined stomach, and an empty purse.” Eduard Böcking, *Ulrichs von Hutten Schriften* (Leipzig, 1860), IV, 169. Erasmus was another critic of pilgrimages. Cf. *PE* 2, 113, n. 3. Cf. also *Erasmi Colloquia*, Vol. II, *Encomium Moriae* (Leipzig, n.d.), pp. 341 ff.

¹⁴¹ *Die einfeltigen menschen*; literally, the simple, or those of untrained mind.

priest, his town authorities, or his overlord that he has a good and sufficient reason for doing so. I say this not because pilgrimages are bad, but because they are ill-advised at this time.¹³⁹ At Rome men do not find a good example, but, on the contrary, pure scandal. The Romanists themselves devised the saying, “The nearer Rome, the worse Christians.” After a pilgrimage to Rome men bring back with them contempt for God and his commandments. They say the first time a man goes to Rome he seeks a rascal; the second time he finds one; the third time he brings him back home with him.¹⁴⁰ Now, however, the Romanists have grown so clever that they can make three pilgrimages in one! The pilgrims have brought back such a pretty mess of experiences from Rome that it would be better never to have seen Rome or known anything about it.

Even if this were not the case there is still another and a better reason: simple people¹⁴¹ are led into error and misunderstanding of the divine command. Such people think that going on a pilgrimage is a precious good work. This is not true. It is a very small good work—frequently it is evil and misleading, for God has not commanded it. But God has commanded that a man should care for his wife and children, perform the duties of a husband, and serve and help his neighbor. Today a man makes a pilgrimage to Rome and spends fifty, maybe a hundred, gulden, something nobody commanded him to do. He permits his wife and child, or his neighbor at any rate, to suffer want back home. And yet the silly fellow thinks he can gloss over such disobedience and contempt of the divine commandment with his self-assigned pilgrimage, which is really nothing but impertinence or a delusion of the devil. The popes have encouraged this sort of thing with their false, feigned, foolish “golden years,”¹⁴² by which the

¹⁴² The “golden” or “jubilee” years were inaugurated by Boniface VIII in 1300. Originally every hundredth year was to be a jubilee, but by 1473 this was reduced to every twenty-fifth year. During these jubilee years indulgences were granted to those who visited the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome. These indulgences were extended on a limited scale by Clement VI in 1350 to those who could not make the pilgrimage to Rome. Still later Boniface IX sent commissioners throughout Europe to dispense the indulgences for the cost of a journey to Rome and back. In a great many instances these indulgences were represented as offering pardon without penitential or sacramental formality. For this representation as well as for irregularity of their financial accounts a great many of these commissioners were punished by the pope. Cf. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin*

people are excited, torn away from God's commandments, and enticed to follow the popes' own erroneous undertakings. The popes have done the very thing they ought to have prevented. But it has brought in money and fortified their illegitimate authority. That is why it has to go on, even if it is contrary to God and the salvation of souls.

To eradicate such false, seductive faith from the minds of simple Christian people and to restore a right understanding of good works, all pilgrimages should be dropped. There is no good in them: no commandment enjoins them, no obedience attaches to them. Rather do these pilgrimages give countless occasions to commit sin and to despise God's commandments. This is why there are so many beggars who commit all kinds of mischief by going on these pilgrimages. These people learn to beg when there is no need to beg, and they make a habit of begging. This accounts for vagabondage and many ills about which I shall not speak here.

If any man wants to go on a pilgrimage today or vow to make a pilgrimage, he should first show his reasons for doing so to his priest or his master. If it turns out that he wants to do it for the sake of a good work, then let the priest or master put his foot down firmly and put an end to the vow and the good work as a devilish delusion. Let priest and master show him how to use the money and effort for the pilgrimage for God's commandments and for works a thousand times better 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 other lands and cities, he may be allowed to do so. But if he made the vow during an illness, then that vow must be annulled and canceled. God's commandment should be emphasized so that henceforth he will be content to keep the vow made in baptism and the commandments of God. Nevertheless, he may be allowed to perform his foolish vow just once to quiet his conscience. Nobody wants to walk in the straight path

of God's commandments common to all of us. Everybody invents new ways and vows for himself as if he had already fulfilled all of God's commandments.

13. Next we come to the masses who make many vows but keep few. Do not be angry, my noble lords! I really mean it for the best. It is the bittersweet truth that the further building of mendicant houses should not be permitted. God help us, there are already too many of them. Would to God they were all dissolved, or at least combined into two or three orders! Their running about the country has never done any good and never will do any good. My advice is to join together ten of these houses or as many as need be, and make them a single institution for which adequate provision is made so that begging will not be necessary. It is far more important to consider what the common people need for their salvation than what St. Francis, St. Dominic, and St. Augustine,¹⁴³ or anyone else has established as a rule, especially because things have not turned out as they planned.

The mendicants should also be relieved of preaching and hearing confession, unless they are called to do this by the bishops, parishes, congregations, or the civil authorities. Nothing but hatred and envy between priests and monks has come out of this kind of preaching and shriving, and this has become a source of great offense and hindrance to the common people. It ought to stop because it can well be dispensed with. It looks suspiciously as though the Holy Roman See has purposely increased this army lest the priests and bishops, unable to stand the pope's tyranny any longer, some day become too powerful for him and start a reformation. That would be unbearable to his holiness.

At the same time the manifold divisions and differences¹⁴⁴ within one and the same order should be abolished. These divisions have

Church, III, 63–66. Benrath notes that very large numbers of Germans participated in the pilgrimages of 1500. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 101, u. 59.

¹⁴³ Luther alludes here to the three leading mendicant orders: the Franciscan Minorites or "little brothers," founded by St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226); the Dominican or "preaching brothers," founded by St. Dominic (d. 1221); and the Augustinian Hermits. This last named order originated during the thirteenth century when Innocent IV and Alexander IV united several small hermit societies under the so-called Augustinian *Rule*. Luther was himself an Augustinian.

¹⁴⁴ The sectarianism deplored here by Luther is illustrated in the case of the Franciscans. Within a few years after the founding of the order the movement divided into two groups: the Spirituales, who kept strictly to the rule of the order; and the Conventuales, who advocated relaxation of the rule as circumstances dictated. When Pope John XXII ordered the Spirituales to conform (1317–1318), this group splintered and the stricter party became schismatics known as *Fraticelli*. Following the papal exile at Avignon and the Great Schism the party of the Observants was

arisen from time to time for very trivial reasons; they have been maintained for even more trivial reasons, and they quarrel with each other with unspeakable hatred and envy. Nevertheless, the Christian faith, which can well exist without any of these distinctions, comes to grief because of both parties, and a good Christian life is valued and sought after only according to the standards of outward laws, works, and methods. Nothing comes of this but hypocrisy and the ruination of souls, as all can plainly see.

The pope must also be forbidden to found or endorse any more of these orders; in fact he must be ordered to abolish some and reduce the numbers of others. Inasmuch as faith in Christ,¹⁴⁵ which alone is the chief possession, exists without any kind of orders, there is no little danger that men will be easily led astray to live according to many and varied works and ways rather than to pay heed to faith. And unless there are wise superiors in the monasteries who preach and stress faith more than the rule of the order, it is impossible for that order not to harm and mislead the simple souls who have regard only for works.

But in our day the superiors who did have faith and who founded the orders have passed away almost everywhere. It is just as it was centuries ago among the children of Israel. When the fathers who had known the wonders and the works of God had passed on, their children, ignorant of God's works and of faith, immediately elevated idolatry and their own human works. In our day, unfortunately, these orders have no understanding of God's works or of faith, but make wretched martyrs of themselves by striving and working to keep their own rules, laws, and ways of life. Yet they never come to a right understanding of a spiritually good life. It is just as 2 Timothy 3[:5, 7] declares, "They have the appearance of a spiritual life, but there is nothing behind it: they are constantly learning, but they never come to a knowledge of what true spiritual life is." If the ruling superior has no

recognized as the true order of St. Francis. At this time another reform led to the establishment of the Capuchins.

¹⁴⁵ *Der glaub Christi*; literally, "the faith of Christ."

¹⁴⁶ Luther knew perfectly well that convents and monasteries did not exist in apostolic times. He is arguing for a monastic system based on the apostolic teaching of the New Testament. See his treatment of this subject in *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows*, in this volume, p. 312.

understanding of Christian faith, it would be better to have no monastery at all; for such a superior cannot govern an order without doing hurt and harm, and the holier and better the superior appears to be in his external works, the more injury and ruin he causes.

To my way of thinking it would be a necessary measure, especially in our perilous times, to regulate convents and monasteries in the same way they were regulated in the beginning, in the days of the apostles, and for a long time afterward.¹⁴⁶ In those days convents and monasteries were all open to everyone to stay in them as long as he pleased. What else were the convents and monasteries but Christian schools where Scripture and the Christian life were taught, and where people were trained to rule and to preach? Thus we read that St. Agnes¹⁴⁷ went to school, and we still see the same practice in some of the convents, like that at Quedlinburg¹⁴⁸ and elsewhere. And in truth all monasteries and convents ought to be so free that God is served freely and not under compulsion. Later on, however, they became tied up with the vows and became an eternal prison. Consequently, these monastic vows are more highly regarded than the vows of baptism. We see, hear, read, and learn more and more about the fruit of all this every day.

I can well suppose that this advice of mine will be regarded as the height of foolishness, but I am not concerned about that at the moment. I advise what seems good to me, let him reject it who will. I see for myself how the vows are kept, especially the vow of chastity. This vow has become universal in these monasteries, and yet it was never commanded by Christ. On the contrary, chastity is given to very few, as he himself says [Matt. 19:11–12], as well as St. Paul [1 Cor. 7:7]. It is my heartfelt wish for everybody to be helped. I do not want to let

¹⁴⁷ St. Agnes, a martyr of the early fourth century, was a popular medieval saint associated with youthful chastity and innocence. According to one legend she was placed in a brothel by a Roman official. Whenever men cast lascivious eyes upon her, they were immediately stricken. The story of St. Agnes which Luther mentions here is probably the highly legendary account of her martyrdom given in Ambrose's *Vita gloriosa Agnetis*. Cf. Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and other Principal Saints*, Vol. I (Dublin, 1836), pp. 88–90.

¹⁴⁸ One of the most famous of the German convents, founded in 936.

Christian souls get entangled in the self-contrived traditions and laws of men.¹⁴⁹

14. We also see how the priesthood has fallen, and how many a poor priest is overburdened with wife and child, his conscience troubled. Yet no one does anything to help him, though he could easily be helped, Though pope and bishops may let things go on as they are, and allow what is heading for ruin to go to ruin, yet I will redeem my conscience and open my mouth freely, whether it vexes pope, bishop, or anybody else. And this is what I say: according to the institution of Christ and the apostles, every city should have a priest or bishop, as St. Paul clearly says in Titus 1[:5]. And this priest should not be compelled to live without a wedded wife, but should be permitted to have one, as St. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3[:2, 4] and Titus 1[:6–7] saying, “A bishop shall be a man who is blameless, and the husband of but one wife, whose children are obedient and well behaved,” etc. According to St. Paul, and also St. Jerome,¹⁵⁰ a bishop and a priest are one and the same thing. But of bishops as they now are the Scriptures know nothing. Bishops have been appointed by ordinance of the Christian church, so that one of them may have authority over several priests.

So then, we clearly learn from the Apostle that it should be the custom for every town to choose from among the congregation a learned and pious citizen, entrust to him the office of the ministry, and support him at the expense of the congregation. He should be free to marry or not. He should have several priests or deacons, also free to marry or not as they choose, to help him minister to the congregation and the community with word and sacrament, as is still the practice in the Greek church. Because there was sometimes so much persecution and controversy with heretics after the apostolic age, there were many holy fathers who voluntarily abstained from matrimony that they might better devote themselves to study and be prepared at any moment for death or battle.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Col. 2:20.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Luther’s understanding of 1 Cor. 4:1 expressed in *Concerning the Ministry* (LW 40, 35). The reference is to Jerome’s *Commentary on Titus* [1:7]. *MPL* 26, 562; cf. also 22, 656.

¹⁵¹ The first definitive and documented canon to prescribe and enforce clerical celibacy was that of Pope Siricius in 385. Cf. Henry Charles Lea, *History of*

But the Roman See has interfered and out of its own wanton wickedness made a universal commandment forbidding priests to marry.¹⁵¹ This was done at the bidding of the devil, as St. Paul declares in 1 Timothy 4[:1, 3], “There shall come teachers who bring the devil’s teaching and forbid marriage.” Unfortunately so much misery has arisen from this that tongue could never tell it. Moreover, this caused the Greek church to separate,¹⁵² and discord, sin, shame, and scandal were increased no end. But this always happens when the devil starts and carries on. What, then, shall we do about it?

My advice is, restore freedom to everybody and leave every man free to marry or not to marry. But then there would have to be a very different kind of government and administration of church property; the whole canon law would have to be demolished; and few benefices would be allowed to get into Roman hands. I fear that greed is a cause of this wretched, unchaste celibacy. As a result, everyone has wanted 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. [Their idea is to] be supported in temporal things without work or worry, contrary to God’s command in Genesis 3[:19] that “in the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread.” The Romanists have colored this to mean that their labor is 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 these burdens upon themselves, so they will have to bear them themselves. I want to speak only of the ministry which God has instituted, the responsibility of which is to minister word and sacrament to a congregation, among whom they reside. Such ministers should be given liberty by a Christian council to marry to avoid temptation and sin. For since God has not bound them, no one else ought to bind them or can bind them, even if he were an angel from heaven, let alone a pope. Everything that canon law decrees to the contrary is mere fable and idle talk.

Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church (revised 3rd ed.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1907), I, 64.

¹⁵² The controversy over celibacy was involved in the schism between the Greek and Roman churches. Cf. *PE* 2, 120, n. 1.

Furthermore, I advise anyone henceforth being ordained a priest or anything else that he in no wise vow to the bishop that he will remain celibate. On the contrary, he should tell the bishop that he has no right whatsoever to require such a vow, and that it is a devilish tyranny to make such a demand. But if anyone is compelled to say, or even wants to say, “so far as human frailty permits,” as indeed many do, let him frankly interpret these same words in a negative manner to mean “I do not promise chastity.” For human frailty does not permit a man to live chastely, but only the strength of angels and the power of heaven. In this way he should keep his conscience free of all vows.

I will advise neither for nor against marrying or remaining single. I leave that to common Christian order and to everyone’s better judgment. I will not conceal my real opinion or withhold comfort from that pitiful band who with wives and children have fallen into disgrace and whose consciences are burdened because people call them priests’ whores and their children priests’ children. As the court-jester¹⁵³ I say this openly.

You will find many a pious priest against whom nobody has anything to say except that he is weak and has come to shame with a woman. From the bottom of their hearts both are of a mind to live together in lawful wedded love, if only they could do it with a clear conscience. But even though they both have to bear public shame, the two are certainly married in the sight of God. And I say that where they are so minded and live together, they should appeal anew to their conscience. Let the priest take and keep her as his lawful wedded wife, and live honestly with her as her husband, whether the pope likes it or not, whether it be against canon or human law. The salvation of your soul is more important than the observance of tyrannical, arbitrary, and wanton laws which are not necessary to salvation or commanded by God. You should do as the children of Israel did who stole from the Egyptians the wages they had earned?¹⁵⁴ or as a servant who steals from his wicked master the wages he has earned: steal from the pope your wedded wife and child! Let the man who has faith enough to

venture this, boldly follow me. I shall not lead him astray. Though I do not have the authority of a pope, I do have the authority of a Christian to advise and help my neighbor against sins and temptations. And that not without cause or reason!

First, not every priest can do without a woman, not only on account of human frailty, but much more on account of keeping house. If he then may keep a woman, and the pope allows that, and yet may not have her in marriage, what is that but leaving a man and a woman alone together and yet forbidding them to fall? It is just like putting straw and fire together and forbidding them to smoke or 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. Therefore, no one 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, and for all the consciences which are confused and tortured because of this ordinance. He has strangled so many wretched souls with this devilish rope that he has long deserved to be driven out of this world. Yet it is my firm belief that God has been more gracious to many souls at their last hour than the pope was to them in their whole lifetime. No good has ever come nor will come out of the papacy and its laws.

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 already at an end and is no longer valid. For God’s commandment, which enjoins that no man shall put husband and wife asunder [Matt. 19:6], is above the pope’s law. And the commandments of God must not be broken or neglected because of the pope’s commandment. Nevertheless, many foolish jurists, along with the pope, have devised impediments and thereby prevented, broken, and brought confusion to the estate of matrimony so that God’s commandment concerning it has altogether disappeared.¹⁵⁵ Need I say more? In the entire canon law of the pope there are not even two lines

¹⁵³ Luther had cast himself in this role in the introduction. Cf. p. 123.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Exod. 12:35–36.

¹⁵⁵ The laws that governed marriage were entirely ecclesiastical and prohibited the marriage of blood relatives as far as the seventh degree of consanguinity. In 1204 the prohibition was restricted by the Fourth Lateran Council to the first four degrees;

lawful marriage within these degrees was possible only by dispensation, which was not difficult to secure by those willing to pay for it. The relation of godparents to godchildren was looked upon as a “spiritual consanguinity” which might serve as a bar to lawful marriage. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 103, n. 74.

which could instruct a devout Christian, and, unfortunately, there are so many mistaken and dangerous laws that nothing would be better than to make a bonfire of it.¹⁵⁶

But if you say that marriage of the clergy would give offense, and that the pope must first grant dispensation, I reply that whatever offense there is in it is the fault of the Roman See which has established such laws with no right and against God. Before God and the Holy Scriptures marriage of the clergy is no offense. Moreover, if the pope can grant dispensations from his greedy and tyrannical laws for money, then every Christian can grant dispensations from these very same laws for God's sake and for the salvation of souls. For Christ has set us free from all man-made laws, especially when they are opposed to God and the salvation of souls, as St. Paul teaches in Galatians 5[:1] and 1 Corinthians 10[:23].

15. Nor must I forget the poor monasteries. The evil spirit, who has now confused all the estates of life and made them unbearable through man-made laws, has taken possession of some abbots, abbesses, and prelates. As a result they govern their brothers and sisters in such a way that they quickly go to hell and lead a wretched existence here and now, as do the devil's martyrs. That is to say, these superiors have reserved to themselves in confession, all, or at least some, of the mortal sins which are secret, so that no brother can absolve another on pain of excommunication and under the vow of obedience. Now nobody finds angels all the time in all places; but we do find flesh and blood which would rather undergo all excommunications and threats rather than confess secret sins to prelates and appointed confessors. Thus these people go to the sacrament with such consciences that they become irregulars¹⁵⁷ and even worse. O blind shepherds! O mad prelates! O ravenous wolves!

¹⁵⁶ This is exactly what Luther did. A copy of the canon law was burned with the papal bull of excommunication on December 10, 1520.

¹⁵⁷ Irregulars are monks who have violated the rules of their order and in consequence have been deprived of the benefits enjoyed by those living within the *regula* or rule of the order; cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 102, n. 65. Among the violations is the concealing of sins in confession; cf. *MA* 2, 398.

¹⁵⁸ *Jartag*, *begencknis*, *seelmessen*, translated here as "endowed masses for the dead," were masses endowed either by the descendants of the deceased or by testamentary bequest. The terms by which Luther referred to these masses indicate

To this I say: if a sin is public or notorious, then it is proper for the prelate alone to punish it, and it is only these sins and no others that he may reserve and select for himself. He has no authority over secret sins, even if they were the worst sins that ever are or can be found. If the prelate makes exceptions of these secret sins, then he is a tyrant. He has no such right and is trespassing upon the prerogative of God's judgment.

And so I advise these children, brothers and sisters: if your superiors are unwilling to permit you to confess your secret sins to whom you choose, then take them to your brother or sister, whomever you like, and be absolved and comforted. Then go and do what you want and ought to do. Only believe firmly that you are absolved, and nothing more is needed. And do not be distressed or driven mad by threats of excommunication, becoming irregulars, or whatever else they threaten. These disciplines are valid only in the case of public or notorious sins which none will confess. They do not apply to you. What are you trying to do, you blind prelates, prevent secret sins by threats? Relinquish what you obviously cannot hold on to so that God's judgment and grace may work in the people under your care! He has not given them so entirely into your hands as to let them go entirely out of his own! In fact, you have the smaller part under you. Let your statutes be merely statutes. Do not exalt them to heaven or give them the weight of divine judgments!

16. It is also necessary to abolish all endowed masses for the dead,¹⁵⁸ or at least to reduce their number, since we plainly see that they have become nothing but a mockery. God is deeply angered by these, and their only purpose is money-grubbing, gluttony, and drunkenness. What pleasure can God take in wretched vigils¹⁵⁹ and masses which are so miserably rattled off, not read or prayed. And if

the occasion of their celebration: *jartag*, the annual anniversary of the beneficiary's death; *begencknis*, the appointed day of the year when all the benefactors of a religious order were commemorated; and *seelmessen*, the masses regularly offered in behalf of souls in purgatory. Cf. Adolph Franz, *Die Messe im Deutschen Mittelalter* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1902), pp. 240–244; cf. also Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 102, n. 67.

¹⁵⁹ Originally the "vigil" was applied to the night before a major festival. Gradually the term came to include the entire day, and finally was applied to the

they were prayed, it would not be for God's sake and out of love, but for the sake of money and of getting a job finished. Now it is impossible for a work which is not done out of unconstrained love to please or suffice God. So it is altogether Christian to abolish, or at least diminish, everything we see which is growing into an abuse and which angers God rather than reconciles him. I would rather—in fact, it would be more pleasing to God and much better—that a chapter, church, or monastery combine all its anniversary masses and vigils and on one day, with sincerity of heart, reverence, and faith, hold one true vigil and mass on behalf of all its benefactors, than hold thousands every year for each individual benefactor without reverence and faith. O dear Christians, God does not care for much praying but for true praying. In fact, he condemns long and repetitious prayers, and says in Matthew 6[:7; 23:14] “They will only earn the more punishment thereby.” But greed, which cannot put its trust in God, brings such things to pass. Avarice is anxious lest it starve to death.

17. Certain penalties or punishments of canon law should be abolished, too, especially the interdict,¹⁶⁰ which without any doubt was invented by the evil spirit. Is it not a devilish work to correct one sin through many and great sins? It is actually a greater sin to silence or suppress the word and worship of God than if one had strangled twenty popes at one time, to say nothing of a priest, or had misused church holdings. This is another of the tender virtues taught in canon law. One of the reasons this law is called “spiritual”¹⁶¹ is that it comes from spirit: not from the Holy Spirit but from the Evil Spirit.

Excommunication must never be used except where the Scriptures prescribe its use, that is, against those who do not hold the true faith or who live in open sin, not for material advantage. But today it is the other way around. Everybody believes and lives as he pleases,

particular liturgical offices connected with the festivals. Luther probably was thinking of vigils in this liturgical sense. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 103, n. 68.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. p. 132, n. 27.

¹⁶¹ The term Luther uses for canon law is *geistlich recht*, literally, “spiritual law.”

¹⁶² *Sermon on Excommunication (Sermon von dem Bann)* (1520). WA 6, 61–75.

¹⁶³ Luther cites a number of penalties imposed by the church upon priests. Aggravation is the threat of excommunication; reagravation is excommunication itself. Deposition is a permanent expulsion from clerical office. Cf. MA 2, 399.

especially those who use excommunication to fleece and defame other people. All the excommunications are for material advantage, for which we have nobody to thank but the holy canon law of unrighteousness. I have said more about this in an earlier discourse.¹⁶²

The other punishments and penalties—suspension, irregularity, aggravation, reagravation, deposition, lightning, thundering, cursings, damnings, and the rest of these devices¹⁶³—should be buried ten fathoms deep in the earth so that their name and memory not be left on earth. The evil spirit unleashed by canon law has brought such a terrible plague and misery into the heavenly kingdom of holy Christendom, having done nothing but destroy and hinder souls by canon law, that the words of Christ in Matthew 23[:13] may well be understood as applying to them,¹⁶⁴ “Woe to you scribes! You have taken upon yourselves the authority to teach, and closed up the kingdom of heaven to men. You do not go in and you stand in the way of those who enter.”

18. All festivals should be abolished, and Sunday alone retained.¹⁶⁵ If it were desired, however, to retain the festivals of Our Lady and of the major 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. Here is the reason: since the feast days are abused by drinking, gambling, loafing, and all manner of sin, we anger God more on holy days than we do on other days. Things are so topsy-turvy that holy days are not holy, but working days are. Nor is any service rendered God and his saints by so many saints' days. On the contrary, they are dishonored; although some foolish prelates think that they have done a good work if each, following the promptings of his own blind devotion, celebrates a festival in honor of St. Otilie¹⁶⁶ or St.

¹⁶⁴ I.e., those who teach and enforce canon law.

¹⁶⁵ Luther refers here to the numerous saints' days and minor religious holidays which fell on weekdays. These observances not only interfered with the working week but led to gambling, drinking, and vice. Cf. *Treatise on Good Works*, in this volume, p. 55.

¹⁶⁶ The feast day of this obscure saint is observed in the territory of Strassburg on December 13. Cf. *The Roman Martyrology* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., 1937), p. 342.

Barbara.¹⁶⁷ But they would be doing something far better if they honored the saint by turning the saint's day into a working day.

Over and above the spiritual injury, the average man incurs two material disadvantages from this practice. First, he neglects his work and spends more money than he would otherwise spend. Second, he weakens his body and makes it less fit. We see this every day, yet nobody thinks of correcting the situation. In such cases we ought not to consider whether or not the pope has instituted the feasts, or whether we must have a dispensation or permission [to omit them]. Every town, council, or governing authority not only has the right, without the knowledge and consent of the pope or bishop, to abolish what is opposed to God and injurious to men's bodies and souls, but indeed is bound at the risk of the salvation of its souls to fight it even though popes and bishop, who ought to be the first to do so, do not consent.

Above all, we ought to abolish church anniversary celebrations¹⁶⁸ outright, since they have become nothing but taverns, fairs, and gambling places, and only increase the dishonoring of God and foster the soul's damnation. It does not help matters to boast that these festivals had a good beginning and are a good work. Did not God set aside his own law, which he had given from heaven, when it was perverted and abused? And does he not daily overturn what he has set up and destroy what he has made because of the same perversion and abuse? As it is written of him in Psalm 18[:26], "You show yourself perverse with the perverted."

19. The grades or degrees within which marriage is forbidden, such as those affecting godparents or the third and fourth degree of kinship,¹⁶⁹ should be changed. If the pope in Rome can grant dispensations and scandalously sell them for money,¹⁷⁰ then every priest may give the same dispensations without price and for the

salvation of souls. Would to God that every priest were able to do and remit without payment all those things we have to pay for at Rome, such as indulgences, letters of indulgence, butter letters, mass letters, and all the rest of the *confessionalia* and skullduggery¹⁷¹ at Rome and free us from that golden noose the canon law, by which the poor people are deceived and cheated of their money! If the pope has the right to sell his noose of gold and his spiritual snares (I ought to say "law")¹⁷² for money, then a priest certainly has more right to tear these nooses and snares apart, and for God's sake tread them underfoot. But if the priest does not have this right, neither has the pope the right to sell them at his disgraceful fair.

Furthermore, fasts should be left to individuals and every kind of food left optional, as the gospel makes them.¹⁷³ Even those gentlemen at Rome scoff at the fasts, and leave us commoners to eat the fat they would not deign to use to grease their shoes, and then afterward they sell us the liberty to eat butter and all sorts of other things. The holy Apostle says that we already have freedom in all these things through the gospel.¹⁷⁴ But they have bound us with their canon law and robbed us of our rights so that we have to buy them back again with money. In so doing they have made our consciences so timid and fearful that it is no longer easy to preach about liberty of this kind because the common people take offense at it and think that eating butter is a greater sin than lying, swearing, or even living unchastely. It is still a human work decreed by men. You may do with it what you will, yet nothing good will ever come of it.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. p. 68, n. 37.

¹⁶⁸ *Kirchweye*, the anniversary celebration of the consecration of a church. These days had become feast days in the parish. Cf. *PE* 2, 128, n. 1.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. p. 179, n. 155.

¹⁷⁰ Dispensations from the marriage laws were issued by the *Datarius*. Cf. p. 151, n. 83.

¹⁷¹ On the *confessionalia*, see p. 155, n. 103; on butter letters, see p. 155, n. 102. Mass letters were certificates entitling the holder to the benefits of masses celebrated by sodalities (cf. p. 192, n. 94). Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 103, n. 75.

¹⁷² Here Luther makes a pun on *geistliche netz*, i.e., spiritual snares, and *geystlich gesetz*, i.e., spiritual or canon law.

¹⁷³ Cf. Matt. 15:11.

¹⁷⁴ 1 Cor. 10:23; Col. 2:16.

20. The chapels in forests and the churches in fields,¹⁷⁵ such as Wilsnack,¹⁷⁶ Sternberg,¹⁷⁷ Trier,¹⁷⁸ the Grimmenthal,¹⁷⁹ and now Regensburg¹⁸⁰ and a goodly number of others which recently have become the goal of pilgrimages, must be leveled. Oh, what a terrible and heavy reckoning those bishops will have to give who permit this devilish deceit and profit by it.¹⁸¹ They should be the first to prevent it and yet they regard it all as a godly and holy thing. They do not see that the devil is behind it all, to strengthen greed, to create a false and fictitious faith, to weaken the parish churches, to multiply taverns and harlotry, to lose money and working time to no purpose, and to lead ordinary people by the nose. If they had read Scripture as well as the damnable canon law, they would know how to deal with this matter!

The miracles that happen in these places prove nothing, for the evil spirit can also work miracles, as Christ has told us in Matthew 24[:24]. If they took the matter seriously and forbade this sort of thing, the miracles would quickly come to an end. But if the thing were of God their prohibition would not hinder it.¹⁸² And if there were no other

¹⁷⁵ Chapels built in the country not for congregations but only for pilgrimages.

¹⁷⁶ Wilsnack, a town sixty-seven miles northwest of Berlin, was a much frequented place of pilgrimage after 1383. There three hosts, singed only about the edges, survived a fire which destroyed the church. In the middle of each host was what appeared to be a drop of blood, taken to be the blood of Christ. When these hosts were taken to a neighboring church they were said to become fiery and luminous without burning. Soon large numbers of pilgrims were drawn to Wilsnack, where the bishop of Havelberg erected a new and impressive edifice. Opposition to the pilgrimages was soon voiced by many people, including John Huss, who wrote about it in his *De omni sanguine Christi glorificato*. Despite these and other protests from several universities, the shrine continued to have wide popular appeal for some years after 1548: when Joachim Ellefeld, a Protestant pastor, burned the hosts. Cf. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnails Company, 1912), XII, 375–376. Cf. also Benrath, *op. cit.* p. 104, n. 76.

¹⁷⁷ Sternberg, a monastery of the Augustinian Hermits, located in Mecklenburg, also displayed a bleeding host after 1491. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 104, n. 76.

¹⁷⁸ A garment alleged to be the seamless garment of Christ for which the executioners cast lots beneath the cross (John 19:23–24) was first exhibited in Trier in 1512. According to tradition the garment was presented to the cathedral church by the Empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. Cf. *PE* 2, 130, n. 1.

¹⁷⁹ Grimmenthal in Meiningen had attracted pilgrimages since 1499. An image of the Virgin, said to have been miraculously created, was displayed there and was alleged to work miraculous healings, especially of syphilis. Cf. *PE* 2, 130, n. 2.

evidence that it is not of God, the fact that men come running to them like herds of cattle, as if they had lost all reason, would be proof enough. This could not be possible if it were of God. Further, God never gave any command about all this. There is neither obedience nor merit in doing it. The thing to do is to step in boldly and protect the people. For whatever has not been commanded and is done beyond what God commands is certainly the devil's doing. To their disadvantage the parish churches are held in less respect. In short, these things are signs of great unbelief among the people, for if they really had faith they would find all they need in their own parish churches to which they are commanded to go.

But what shall I say now? Every bishop thinks only of how he can set up and maintain such a place of pilgrimage in his diocese.¹⁸³ He is not at all concerned that the people believe and live aright. The rulers are just like the people. The blind lead the blind [Luke 6:39]. In fact, where pilgrimages do not catch on, they set to work to canonize saints,¹⁸⁴ not to honor the saints, who would be honored enough

¹⁸⁰ “The fair Virgin of Regensburg” was an image of the Virgin similar to that exhibited in Grimmenthal. The shrine was opened March 25, 1519, and within a month fifty thousand pilgrims are said to have worshiped there (*PE* 2, 130, n. 3). Regensburg had previously been the location of pilgrimages ages honoring SS. Erhard and Wolfgang, bishops of Ratisbon (*WA* 6, 447, n. 1).

¹⁸¹ The pilgrimages provided a large revenue from the sale of medals which were worn as amulets, the fees for masses at the shrines, and the free-will offerings of the pilgrims. Most of this revenue accrued to the bishop of the diocese. The popes, however, did not overlook opportunities for the sale of indulgences at these shrines. The *Gravamina* of 1521 state that the bishops demanded at least 25 to 33 per cent of the offerings made at the shrines of pilgrimages. Cf. *PE* 2, 130, n. 4.

¹⁸² Cf. Acts 5:39.

¹⁸³ Identification with a saint conferred distinction and status upon a church. Because of the income to be had from pilgrimages, church authorities were willing to pay handsome sums for the canonization of deceased clerical or other dignitaries Cf. *PE* 2, 131, n. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Canonization, the definitive sentence by which the pope declares a soul (previously beatified) to have entered into eternal glory, is said to confer a sevenfold honor: (1) enrolment among the saints; (2) invocation in public prayer; (3) dedication of churches in the saint's memory; (4) the mass and office publicly offered to God in the saint's honor; (5) festival days celebrated in the saint's memory; (6) pictorial representations of the saint in heavenly light; and (7) the honoring of the saint's relics. Cf. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, II, 364–369.

without being canonized, but to draw the crowds and bring in the money. At this point pope and bishops lend their aid. There is a deluge of indulgences. There is always money enough for these. But nobody worries about what God has commanded. Nobody runs after these things; nobody has money for them. How blind we are! We not only give the devil free rein for his mischief, but we even strengthen and multiply his mischief. I would rather the dear saints were left in peace and the simple people not led astray! What spirit gave the pope authority to canonize saints? Who tells him whether they are saints or not? Are there not enough sins on earth already without tempting God, without interfering in his judgment and setting up the dear saints as decoys to get money?

My advice is to let the saints canonize themselves. Indeed, it is God alone who should canonize them. And let every man stay in his own parish; there he will find more than in all the shrines even if they were all rolled into one. In your own parish you find baptism, the sacrament, preaching, and your neighbor, and these things are greater than all the saints in heaven, for all of them were made saints by God's word and sacrament. As long as we esteem such wonderful things so little, God is just in his wrathful condemnation in allowing the devil to lead us where he likes, to conduct pilgrimages, found churches and chapels, canonize saints, and do other such fool's works so that we depart from true faith into a novel and wrong kind of belief. This is what the devil did in ancient times to the people of Israel, when he led them away from the temple at Jerusalem to countless other places. Yet he did it all in the name of God and under the pretense of holiness. All the prophets preached against it, and they were martyred for doing so. But today nobody preaches against it. If somebody were to preach against it all, perhaps bishop, pope, priest, and monk would possibly martyr him, too. St. Antoninus of Florence¹⁸⁵ and certain others must now be made saints and canonized in this way, so that their holiness, which

¹⁸⁵ Antoninus (1389–1459) had been archbishop of his native city of Florence and won renown as reformer of the Dominican Order. At the time Luther wrote the present treatise the procedure for canonizing Antoninus was already underway. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 105, n.77; cf. also WA 6, 449, n. 1.

¹⁸⁶ *Schindleich*, i.e., a place where the carrion of skinned animals is piled.

¹⁸⁷ *Indulta*, i.e., papal dispensations which conveyed advantages otherwise unobtainable through normal channels. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 105, n. 78.

would otherwise have served only for the glory of God and set a good example, may be used to bring fame and money.

Although the canonization of saints may have been a good thing in former days, it is certainly never good practice now. Like many other things that were good in former times, feast days, church holdings, and ornaments now are scandalous and offensive. For it is evident that through the canonization of saints neither God's glory nor the improvement of Christians is sought, but only money and reputation. One church wants to have the advantage over the other and would not like to see another church enjoy that advantage in common. Spiritual treasures have even been misused to gain temporal goods in these last evil days so that everything, even God himself, has been forced into the service of Avarice. Such advantage only promotes schisms, sects, and pride. A church that has advantages over others looks down on them and exalts itself. Yet all divine treasures are common to all and serve all and ought to further the cause of unity. But the pope likes things as they are. He would not like it if all Christians were equal and one with each other.

It is fitting to say here that all church licenses, bulls, and whatever else the pope sells in that skinning house¹⁸⁶ of his in Rome should be abolished, disregarded, or extended to all. But if he sells or gives special licenses,¹⁸⁷ privileges, indulgences, graces, advantages, and faculties¹⁸⁸ to Wittenberg, Halle, Venice, and above all to his own city of Rome, why does he not give these things to all churches in general? Is it not his duty to do everything in his power for all Christians, freely and for God's sake, even shed his blood for them? Tell me, then, why does he give or sell to one church and not to another? Or must the accursed money make so great a difference in the eyes of His Holiness among Christians, who all have the same baptism, word, faith, Christ, God, and all else? Do the Romanists want us to be so blind to all these things, though we have eyes to see, and be such fools, though we have

¹⁸⁸ Faculties usually were extraordinary powers to grant indulgences and absolution in reserved cases. They were bestowed by the pope and could be revoked by him at any time. Sometimes they were given to local church officials, but were usually held by the legates or commissioners sent from Rome. Complaints were made at the diets of Worms (1521) and Nürnberg (1523) that the papal commissioners and legates interfered with the normal procedure of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and appointment. Cf. PE 2, 138, n. 2.

a perfectly good faculty of reason, that we worship such greed, skullduggery, and pretense? The pope is a shepherd, but only so long as you have money, and no longer. And still the Romanists are not ashamed of this rascality of leading us hither and thither with their bulls. They are concerned only about the accursed money and nothing else!

My advice is this: If such fool's work cannot be abolished, then every decent Christian should open his eyes and not permit himself to be led astray by the Romanist bulls and seals and all their glittering show. Let him stay at home in his own parish church and be content with the best; his baptism, the gospel, his faith, his Christ, and his God, who is the same God everywhere. Let the pope remain a blind leader of the blind. Neither an angel nor a pope can give you as much as God gives you in your parish church. The fact is, the pope leads you away from the gifts of God, which are yours without cost, to his gifts, for which you have to pay. He gives you lead for gold, hide for meat, the string for the purse, wax for honey, words for goods, the letter for the spirit.¹⁸⁹ You see all this before your very eyes, but you refuse to take notice. If you intend to ride to heaven on his wax and parchment, this chariot will soon break down and you will fall into hell, and not in God's name!

Let this be your one sure guide: Whatever you have to buy from the pope is neither good nor from God. For what God gives is not only given without charge, but the whole world is punished and damned for not being willing to receive it as a free gift. I mean the gospel and God's work. We have deserved God's letting us be so led astray because we have despised his holy word and the grace of baptism. It is as St. Paul says, "God shall send a strong delusion upon all those who have not received the truth to their salvation, so that they believe and follow lies and knavery" [2 Thess. 2:11]. This serves them right.

¹⁸⁹ Luther alludes to the exchange of a papal bull for money. Lead was the leaden seal attached to the bull; hide, the parchment on which it was written; the string was the cord from which the seal hung; wax, the seal which held the cord to the parchment. Cf. *PE* 2, 134, n. 1.

¹⁹⁰ Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites, and Servites.

¹⁹¹ I.e., wandering beggars who acted as ambassadors or messengers of a particular saint. Their practice was to enrol their benefactors on the list of beneficiaries of the saint they claimed to represent. This enrolment, they claimed,

21. One of the greatest necessities is the abolition of all begging throughout Christendom. Nobody ought to go begging among Christians. It would even be a very simple matter to make a law to the effect that every city should look after its own poor, if only we had the courage and the intention to do so. No beggar from outside should be allowed into the city whether he might call himself pilgrim or mendicant monk. Every city should support its own poor, and if it was too small, the people in the surrounding villages should also be urged to contribute, since in any case they have to feed so many vagabonds and evil rogues who call themselves mendicants. In this way, too, it could be known who was really poor, and who was not.

There would have to be an overseer or warden who knows all the poor and informs the city council or the clergy what they needed. Or some other better arrangement might be made. As I see it, there is no other business in which so much skullduggery and deceit are practiced as in begging, and yet it could all be easily abolished. Moreover, this unrestricted universal begging is harmful to the common people. I have figured out that each of the five or six mendicant orders¹⁹⁰ visits the same place more than six or seven times every year. In addition to these there are the usual beggars, the "ambassador" beggars,¹⁹¹ and the panhandlers.¹⁹² This adds up to sixty times a year that a town is laid under tribute! This is over and above what the secular authorities demand in the way of taxes and assessments. All this the Romanist See steals in return for its wares and consumes for no purpose. To me it is one of God's greatest miracles that we can still go on existing and find the wherewithal to support ourselves!

To be sure, some think that if these proposals were adopted the poor would not be so well provided for, that fewer great stone houses and monasteries would be built, and fewer so well furnished. I can well believe all this. But none of it is necessary. He who has chosen poverty

provided immunity from particular diseases, accidents, and other misfortunes. Protests were raised against this practice at the diets of Worms (1521) and Nürnberg (1523). Included in this protest were the *terminarii*, the collectors of alms sent out by these mendicants. Cf. the extensive note in Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 105, n. 79; cf. also *WA* 6, 451, n. 1.

¹⁹² I.e., men who spent their lives wandering from one place of pilgrimage to another subsisting on the alms of the faithful. Cf. *PE* 2, 135, n. 3.

ought not to be rich. If he wants to be rich, let him put his hand to the plow and seek his fortune from the land. It is enough if the poor are decently cared for so that they do not die of hunger or cold. It is not fitting that one man should live in idleness on another's labor, or be rich and live comfortably at the cost of another's hardship, as it is according to the present perverted custom. St. Paul says, "Whoever will not work shall not eat" [2 Thess. 3:10]. God has not decreed that any man shall live off another man's property, save only the clergy who preach and have a parish to care for, and these should, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9[:14], on account of their spiritual labor. And also as Christ says to the apostles, "Every laborer is worthy of his wage" [Luke 10:7].

22. It is also to be feared that the many masses which were endowed in ecclesiastical foundations and monasteries are not only of little use, but arouse the great wrath of God. It would therefore be profitable not to endow any more of these masses, but rather to abolish many that are already endowed. It is obvious that these masses are regarded only as sacrifices and good works, even though they are sacraments just like baptism and penance, which profit only those who receive them and no one else. But now the custom of saying masses for the living and the dead has crept in, and all hopes are built upon them. This is why so many masses are endowed, and why the state of affairs we see around us has developed out of it.

My proposal is perhaps too bold and an unheard-of thing, especially for those who are concerned that they would lose their job and means of livelihood if such masses were discontinued. I must refrain from saying more about it until we arrive again at a proper understanding of what the mass is and what it is for. Unfortunately, for many years now it has been a job, a way to earn a living. Therefore, from now on I will advise a man to become a shepherd or some sort of workman rather than a priest or a monk, unless he knows well in advance what this celebrating of masses is all about.

¹⁹³ Bertram Lee Woolf notes that in this passage Luther touches upon a matter of much importance in the history of social structure, namely, the appointment of the younger sons of the upper classes to ecclesiastical positions. These younger sons were embittered because appointments to file more substantial benefices were given to papal favorites. Luther's hope was that if these sons were given the opportunity to study the Bible and sound teaching they would infuse an evangelical spirit into

I am not speaking, however, of the old foundations and cathedrals, which were doubtless established for the sake of the children of the nobility. According to German custom not every one of a nobleman's children can become a landowner or a ruler. It was intended that these children should be looked after in such foundations, and there be free to serve God, to study, to become educated people, and to educate others.¹⁹³ I am speaking now of the new foundations which have been established just for the saying of prayers and masses, and because of their example the older foundations are being burdened with the same sort of praying and mass celebrating so that even these old foundations serve little or no purpose. And it is by the grace of God that they finally hit the bottom, as they deserve. That is to say, they have been reduced to anthem singers, organ wheezers, and reciting decadent, indifferent masses to get and consume the income from the endowments. Pope, bishops, and university scholars ought to be looking into these things and writing about them, and yet it is precisely they who do the most to promote them. Whatever brings in money they let go on and on. The blind lead the blind [Luke 6:39]. This is what greed and canon law accomplish.

It should no longer be permissible for one person to hold more than one canonry or benefice. Each must be content with a modest position so that someone else may also have something. This would do away with the excuses of those who say that they must hold more than one such office to maintain their proper station. A proper station could be interpreted in such broad terms that an entire country would not be enough to maintain it. But greed and a secret lack of trust in God go hand in hand in this matter, so that what is alleged to be the needs of a proper station is nothing but greed and unbelief.

23. The brotherhoods,¹⁹⁴ and for that matter, indulgences, letters of indulgence, butter letters, mass letters, dispensations, and everything of that kind, should be snuffed out and brought to an end. There is nothing good about them. If the pope has the authority to grant you a

priests and hierarchy. Cf. Woolf's *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther* (London: Lutterworth Press), I (1952), 175, n. 1.

¹⁹⁴ The brotherhoods flourished in the sixteenth century. Members of brotherhoods were obligated to recite certain prayers and to attend certain masses at appointed times. Membership in the association meant that each member participated in the benefits accruing from the good works of all the members. In the case of most

dispensation to eat butter, to absent yourself from mass, and the like, then he ought also to be able to delegate this authority to the priests, from whom he had no right to take it in the first place. I am speaking especially of those brotherhoods in which indulgences, masses, and good works are apportioned. My dear friend, in your baptism you have entered into a brotherhood with Christ, with all the angels, with the saints, and with all Christians on earth. Hold fast to this and live up to its demands, and you have all the brotherhoods you want. Let the others glitter as they will. Compared with the true brotherhood in Christ those brotherhoods are like a penny compared with a gulden. But if there were a brotherhood which raised money to feed the poor or to help the needy, that would be a good idea. It would find its indulgences and its merits in heaven. But today nothing comes of these groups except gluttony and drunkenness.

Above all, we should drive out of German territory the papal legates with their faculties,¹⁹⁵ which they sell to us for large sums of money. This traffic is nothing but skullduggery. For example, for payment of money they make unrighteousness into righteousness, and they dissolve oaths, vows, and agreements, thereby destroying and teaching us to destroy the faith and fealty which have been pledged. They assert that the pope has authority to do this. It is the devil who tells them to say these things. They sell us doctrine so satanic, and take money for it, that they are teaching us sin and leading us to hell.

If there were no other base trickery to prove that the pope is the true Antichrist, this one would be enough to prove it. Hear this, O pope, not of all men the holiest but of all men the most sinful! O that God from heaven would soon destroy your throne and sink it in the abyss of hell! Who has given you authority to exalt yourself above your God, to

of the brotherhoods, the membership enjoyed certain indulgences. In 1520 Wittenberg boasted of twenty such fraternities; Cologne, eighty; Hamburg, more than one hundred. In 1519 Degenhard Peffinger of Wittenberg was a member of eight such fraternities in his hometown and of twenty-seven in other places. Luther had expressed his views on these groups more fully in his *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods* (1519). LW 35, 47–73 (WA 2, 742–758). Cf. the detailed footnote in Benrath, *op. cit.*, p. 106, n. 80.

¹⁹⁵ See p. 188, n. 188.

¹⁹⁶ Ladislaus III, king of Poland (1424–1444), and, as Uladislaus I, king of Hungary (1440–1444), forced the Sultan to sue for peace in 1443. The papal legate,

break and loose his commandments, and teach Christians, especially the German nation, praised throughout history for its nobility, its constancy and fidelity, to be inconstant, perjurers, traitors, profligates, and faithless? God has commanded us to keep word and faith even with an enemy, but you have taken it upon yourself to loose his commandment and have ordained in your heretical, anti-Christian decretals that you have his power. Thus through your voice and pen the wicked Satan lies as he has never lied before. You force and twist the Scriptures to suit your fancy. O Christ, my Lord, look down; let the day of your judgment break down and destroy this nest of devils at Rome. There sits the man of whom St. Paul said, “He shall exalt himself above you, sit in your church, and set himself up as God, that man of sin, the son of perdition” [2 Thess. 2:3–5]. What else is papal power but simply the teaching and increasing of sin and wickedness? Papal power serves only to lead souls into damnation in your name and, to all outward appearances, with your approval!

In ancient times the children of Israel had to keep the oath which they had unwittingly been deceived into giving to their enemies, the Gibeonites [Josh. 9:3–21]. And King Zedekiah was miserably lost along with all his people because he broke his oath to the king of Babylon [2 Kings 24:20–25:7]. In our own history, a hundred years ago, that fine king of Hungary and Poland, Ladislaus, was tragically slain by the Turk along with so many of his people because he allowed himself to be led astray by the papal legate and cardinal and broke the good and advantageous treaty and solemn agreement he had made with the Turk.¹⁹⁶ The pious Emperor Sigismund had no more success after the Council of Constance when he allowed those scoundrels to break the oath that had been given to John Huss and Jerome.¹⁹⁷ All the trouble between the Bohemians and ourselves stems from this. Even in

Cardinal Caesarini, absolved the king from the fulfilment of the treaty’s conditions. Ladislaus renewed the war and at the battle of Varna, 1444, the Hungarians were decisively defeated and Ladislaus and Caesarini both killed. Cf. *PE* 2, 139, n. 1.

¹⁹⁷ John Huss had come to Constance under the assurance of safe-conduct granted by Emperor Sigismund. Luther errs when he assumes that Jerome of Prague had a similar safe-conduct. In September, 1415, the council decreed that “neither by natural, divine, nor human law was any promise to be observed to the prejudice of the catholic faith.” Both Huss and Jerome of Prague were subsequently executed. Cf. *PE* 2, 140, n. 1.

our own times—God help us!—how much Christian blood has been shed because of the oath and the alliance which Pope Julius made between Emperor Maximilian and King Louis of France, and afterward broke!¹⁹⁸ How could I tell all the trouble the popes have stirred up by their devilish presumption with which they annul oaths and vows made between powerful princes, making a mockery of these things, and taking money for it? I hope that the day of judgment is at hand. Things could not possibly be worse than the state of affairs the Romanist See is promoting. The pope suppresses God's commandment and exalts his own. If he is not the Antichrist, then somebody tell me who is! But more of this another time.

24. It is high time we took up the Bohemian question¹⁹⁹ and dealt seriously and honestly with it. We should come to an understanding with them so that the terrible slander, hatred, and envy on both sides comes to an end. As befits my folly, I shall be the first to submit an opinion on this subject, with due deference to everyone who may understand the case better than I.

First, we must honestly confess the truth and stop justifying ourselves. We must admit to the Bohemians that John Huss and Jerome of Prague were burned at Constance²⁰⁰ against the papal, Christian, imperial oath and promise of safe-conduct. This happened contrary to God's commandment and gave the Bohemians ample cause for bitterness. And although they should have acted as perfect Christians and suffered this grave injustice and disobedience to God by these people, nevertheless they were not obliged to condone such conduct and acknowledge it as just. To this day they would rather give up life and limb than admit that it is right to break and deal contrarily with an imperial, papal, and Christian oath. So then, although it is the impatience of the Bohemians that is at fault, yet the pope and his crowd are still more to blame for all the misery, error, and the loss of souls which have followed that council.

I will not pass judgment here on the articles of John Huss, or defend his errors, although I have not yet found any errors in his writings

according to my way of thinking. I firmly believe that those who violated a Christian safe-conduct and a commandment of God with their faithless betrayal gave neither a fair judgment nor an honest condemnation. Without doubt they were possessed more by the evil spirit than by the Holy Spirit. Nobody will doubt that the Holy Spirit does not act contrary to the commandment of God, and nobody is so ignorant as not to know that the violation of good faith and of a promise of safe-conduct is contrary to the commandment of God, even though they had been promised to the devil himself, to say nothing of a mere heretic. It is also quite evident that such a promise was made to John Huss and the Bohemians and was not kept, and that he was burnt at the stake as a result. I do not wish, however, to make John Huss a saint or a martyr, as some of the Bohemians do. But at the same time I do acknowledge that an injustice was done to him, and that his books and doctrines were unjustly condemned. For the judgments of God are secret and terrible, and no one save God alone should undertake to reveal or utter them.

I only want to say this. John Huss may have been as bad a heretic as it is possible to be; nevertheless he was burned unjustly and in violation of the commandment of God. Further, the Bohemians should not be forced to approve of such conduct, or else we shall never achieve any unity. Not obstinacy, but the open admission of the truth must make us one. It is useless to pretend, as was done at the time, that the oath of safe-conduct given to a heretic need not be kept. That is as much as to say that God's commandments need not be kept so that God's commandments may be kept. The devil made the Romanists mad and foolish so that they did not know what they had said and done. God has commanded that a promise of safe-conduct shall be kept. We should keep such a commandment though the whole world collapses. How much more, then, when it is only a question of freeing a heretic! We should overcome heretics with books, not with fire, as the ancient fathers did. If it were wisdom to vanquish heretics with fire, then the public hangmen would be the most learned scholars on

¹⁹⁸ In 1508 Pope Julius II, Louis XII of France, Emperor Maximilian I, and Ferdinand the Catholic of Spain entered into an alliance against Venice. When Venice capitulated to the pope in 1510, he broke the alliance and waged war on France. Cf. *The Cambridge Modern History*, I, 130–131.

¹⁹⁹ Luther refers to the Hussite movement in Bohemia; cf. p. 197, n. 201.

²⁰⁰ Cf. p. 194, n. 197.

earth. We would no longer need to study books, for he who overcomes another by force would have the right to burn him at the stake.

Second, the emperor and princes should send a few really godly and sensible bishops and scholars over to the Bohemians. On no account should they send a cardinal or a papal legate or an inquisitor, for officials like these are most unversed in Christian things. They do not seek to save souls, but, like all the pope's henchmen, only their own power, profit, and prestige. In fact, these very people were the chief actors in this miserable business at Constance. The men sent into Bohemia should find out from the Bohemians how things stand in regard to their faith, and whether it is possible to unite all their sects.²⁰¹ In this case the pope ought to use his authority awhile for the sake of saving souls and, in accordance with the decree of the truly Christian Council of Nicaea,²⁰² allow the Bohemians to choose an archbishop of Prague from among their number and let him be confirmed by the bishop of Olmütz in Moravia, or the bishop of Gran in Hungary, or the bishop of Gnesen in Poland, or the bishop of Magdeburg in Germany. It will be enough if he is confirmed by one or two of these, as was the custom in the time of St. Cyprian.²⁰³ The pope has no right to oppose such an arrangement, and if he does oppose it, he will be acting like a wolf and a tyrant; no one ought to obey him and his ban should be met with a counterban.

If, however, in deference to the chair of Peter, it was desired to do this with the pope's consent, then let it be done that way, provided it does not cost the Bohemians anything and provided the pope does not put them under the slightest obligation or bind them with his tyrannical oaths and vows as he does all other bishops, contrary to God and right. If he is not satisfied with the honor of having his consent asked, then let them not bother any more about the pope or his vows and his rights,

²⁰¹ After the death of Huss a number of movements developed in Bohemia which held in varying degrees to the teachings of Huss. These movements caused considerable political and ecclesiastical turmoil in Bohemia for well over a century after Huss's death. A large number of Hussites looked favorably upon Luther. Cf. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, IV (1909), 419–420; cf. also II (1908), 213 ff.

²⁰² Cf. p. 137, n. 40.

²⁰³ Bishop of Carthage (249–258).

his laws and his tyrannies. Let the election suffice, and let the blood of all the souls endangered by this state of affairs cry out against him. No one ought to consent to what is wrong. It is enough to have shown courtesy to tyranny. If it cannot be otherwise, then an election and the approval of the common people can even now be quite as valid as confirmation by a tyrant, though I hope this will not be necessary. Someday some of the Romanists or some of the good bishops and scholars will take notice of the pope's tyranny and repudiate it.

I would also advise against compelling the Bohemians to abolish both kinds in the sacrament²⁰⁴ since that practice is neither un-Christian nor heretical. If they want to, I would let them go on in the way they have been doing. Yet the new bishop should be careful that no discord arises because of such a practice. He should kindly instruct them that neither practice is wrong,²⁰⁵ just as it ought not to cause dissension that the clergy differ from the laity in manner of life and dress. By the same token, if they were unwilling to receive Roman canon law, they should not be forced to do so, but rather the prime concern should be that they live sincerely in faith and in accordance with Holy Scripture. For Christian faith and life can well exist without the intolerable laws of the pope. In fact, faith cannot properly exist unless there are fewer of these Romanist laws or unless they are even abolished altogether. In baptism we have become free and have been made subject only to God's word. Why should we become bound by the word of any man? As St. Paul says, "You have become free; do not become a bondservant of men,"²⁰⁶ that is, of those men who rule by man-made laws.

If I knew that the Pickards²⁰⁷ held no other error regarding the sacrament of the altar except believing that the bread and wine are present in their true nature, but that the body and blood of Christ are

²⁰⁴ The administration of the sacrament in both kinds was one of the chief points of controversy between the Roman church and the Hussites.

²⁰⁵ Luther had not yet reached the conviction that the administration of the cup to the laity was a necessity, but in 1521 he advocated that a general council should decree that the sacrament be administered in both kinds. Cf. *PE* 2, 144, n. 1, and *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* in *LW* 32, 55–62.

²⁰⁶ Cf. 1 Cor. 7:23; Gal. 5:1.

²⁰⁷ The term Pickard, a corruption of Beghards, was a derisive name for the Bohemian Brethren, a Hussite sect.

truly present under them, then I would not condemn them but would let them come under the bishop of Prague. For it is not an article of faith that bread and wine are not present in the sacrament in their own essence and nature, but this is an opinion of St. Thomas²⁰⁸ and the pope. On the other hand, it is an article of faith that the true natural body and blood of Christ are present in the natural bread and wine. So then, we should tolerate the opinions of both sides until they come to an agreement because there is no danger in believing that the bread is there or that it is not. We have to endure all sorts of practices and ordinances which are not harmful to faith. On the other hand, if they believed otherwise, I would rather think of them as outside,²⁰⁹ though I would teach them the truth.

Whatever other errors and schisms are discovered in Bohemia should be tolerated until the archbishop has been restored and has gradually brought all the people together again in one common doctrine. They will certainly never be united by force, defiance, or by haste. Patience and gentleness are needed here. Did not even Christ have to tarry with his disciples and bear with their unbelief for a long time until they believed his resurrection? If only the Bohemians had a regular bishop and church administration again, without Romanist tyranny, I am sure that things would soon be better.

The restoration of the temporal goods which formerly belonged to the church should not be too strictly demanded, but since we are Christians and each is bound to help the rest, we have full power to give them these things for the sake of unity and allow them to retain them in the sight of God and before the eyes of the world. For Christ says, “Where two are in agreement with one another on earth, there am I in the midst of them” [Matt. 18:19–20]. Would to God that on both

sides we were working toward this unity, extending to each other the hand of brotherhood and humility. Love is greater and is more needed than the papacy at Rome, which is without love. Love can exist apart from the papacy.

With this counsel I shall have done what I could. If the pope or his supporters hinder it, they shall have to render an account for having sought their own advantage rather than their neighbor’s, contrary to the love of God. The pope ought to give up his papacy and all his possessions and honors, if thereby he could save one soul. But today he would rather let the whole world perish than yield one hairsbreadth of his presumptuous authority. And yet he wants to be the holiest! With that my responsibility comes to an end.

25. The universities, too, need a good, thorough reformation. I must say that, no matter whom it annoys. Everything the papacy has instituted and ordered serves only to increase sin and error. What else are the universities, unless they are utterly changed from what they have been hitherto, than what the book of Maccabees calls *gymnasia epeborum et graeae gloriae*?²¹⁰ What are they but places where loose living is practiced, where little is taught of the Holy Scriptures and Christian faith, and where only the blind, heathen teacher Aristotle rules²¹¹ far more than Christ? In this regard my advice would be that Aristotle’s *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Concerning the Soul*, and *Ethics*, which hitherto have been thought to be his best books, should be completely discarded along with all the rest of his books that boast about nature, although nothing can be learned from them either about nature or the Spirit. Moreover, nobody has yet understood him, and many souls have been burdened with fruitless labor and study, at the cost of much precious time. I dare say that any potter has more

²⁰⁸ Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was then, as now, the foremost Roman Catholic theologian. It was the teaching of Thomas that the bread and wine were transubstantiated into the flesh and blood of Christ. The accidents of the elements, i.e., texture, color, taste, remained, but the substance was changed. Transubstantiation is still official Roman doctrine. Luther’s views at this time were developed in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520). LW 36, 28–35.

²⁰⁹ I.e., outside of the church.

²¹⁰ I.e., places for the training of youth in the fashions of Greek culture. Cf. 2 Macc. 4:9.

²¹¹ Scholars other than Luther were and had been against the Aristotelian domination in the medieval universities, e.g., Roger Bacon and Erasmus. In brief, Luther’s animadversion sprang mainly from Aristotle’s baleful effect on Christian soteriology. Aristotle taught that a man becomes good by doing good, and ultimately led theologians to a belief in man’s power to save himself. Luther taught that it was only when a man lost all belief in himself that he ever knew what it was to have faith in Christ. Luther had no objection to heathen philosophy as such and saw its value in the discipline of logical reasoning, but his main objection to Aristotle was that he served to displace Christ who alone could save a man and give him true knowledge of natural and spiritual things.

knowledge of nature than is written in these books. It grieves me to the quick that this damned, conceited, rascally heathen has deluded and made fools of so many of the best Christians with his misleading writings. God has sent him as a plague upon us on account of our sins.

Why this wretched fellow in his best book, *Concerning the Soul*, teaches that the soul dies with the body, although many have tried without success to save his reputation. As though we did not have the Holy Scriptures, in which we are fully instructed about all things, things about which Aristotle has not the faintest clue! And yet this dead heathen has conquered, obstructed, and almost succeeded in suppressing the books of the living God. When I think of this miserable business I can only believe that the devil has introduced this study.

For the same reasons his book on ethics is the worst of all books. It flatly opposes divine grace and all Christian virtues, and yet it is considered one of his best works. Away with such books! Keep them away from Christians. No one can accuse me of overstating the case, or of condemning what I do not understand. Dear friend, I know what I am talking about. I know my Aristotle as well as you or the likes of you. I have lectured on him and been lectured on him,²¹² and I understand him better than St. Thomas or Duns Scotus²¹³ did. I can boast about this without pride and if necessary, I can prove it. It makes no difference to me that so many great minds have devoted their labor to him for so many centuries. Such objections do not disturb me as once they did, for it is plain as day that other errors have remained for even more centuries in the world and in the universities.

I would gladly agree to keeping Aristotle's books, *Logic*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*, or at least keeping and using them in an abridged form, as useful in training young people to speak and to preach properly. But the commentaries and notes must be abolished, and as Cicero's

²¹² Luther lectured on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* four times a week during his first year in Wittenberg (1508–1509).

²¹³ Duns Scotus (d. 1308) was highly regarded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a rival to Thomas for first place among theologians.

²¹⁴ Papal decrees.

²¹⁵ *Scrinium pectoris*. In the days of the Roman Empire official papers and documents were stored in a chest called the *scrinium*. This term was carried over into the Middle Ages and designated the chest in which the instruments of a monastery

Rhetoric is read without commentaries and notes, so Aristotle's *Logic* should be read as it is without all these commentaries. But today nobody learns how to speak or how to preach from it. The whole thing has become nothing but a matter for disputation and a weariness to the flesh.

In addition to all this there are, of course, the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages, as well as the mathematical disciplines and history. But all this I commend to the experts. In fact, reform would come of itself if only we gave ourselves seriously to it. Actually a great deal depends on it, for it is here in the universities that the Christian youth and our nobility, with whom the future of Christendom lies, will be educated and trained. Therefore, I believe that there is no work more worthy of pope or emperor than a thorough reform of the universities. And on the other hand, nothing could be more devilish or disastrous than unreformed universities.

I leave the medical men to reform their own faculties; I take the jurists and theologians as my own responsibility. The first thing I would say is that it would be a good thing if canon law were completely blotted out, from the first letter to the last, especially the decretals.²¹⁴ More than enough is written in the Bible about how we should behave in all circumstances. The study of canon law only hinders the study of the Holy Scriptures. Moreover, the greater part smacks of nothing but greed and pride. Even if there were much in it that was good, it should still be destroyed, for the pope has the whole canon law imprisoned in the "chamber of his heart,"²¹⁵ so that henceforth any study of it is just a waste of time and a farce. These days canon law is not what is written in the books of law, but whatever the pope and his flatterers want. Your cause may be thoroughly established in canon law, but the pope always has his chamber of the heart in the matter, and all law, and with it the whole world, has to be

were stored. Boniface VIII (1294–1303), who added his own book to the five books of the decretals of Gregory IX, said with reference to his activity in canon law, "The Roman pontiff has all laws in the chamber [*scrinium*] of his heart." This statement was incorporated within canon law and meant that the pope claimed authority over canon law. Cf. *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX*, lib. vi, tit. II, C. I. *CIC* 2, 937. Cf. *CIC* 2, 929. Cf. also Friedrich Maassen, *Geschichte der Quellen und der Literatur des Canonischen Rechts im Abendlande bis zum Ausgange des Mittelalters*, Vol. I (Leipzig, 1870).

guided by that. Now it is often a villain, and even the devil himself, who rules the *scrinium*—and they proudly boast that it is the Holy Spirit who rules it! Thus they deal with Christ’s poor people. They impose many laws upon them but obey none themselves. They compel others to obey these laws, or buy their way out with money.

Since then the pope and his followers have suspended the whole canon law as far as they themselves are concerned, and since they pay it no heed, but give thought only to their own wanton will, we should do as they do and discard these volumes. Why should we waste our time studying them? We could never fathom the arbitrary will of the pope, which is all that canon law has become. Let canon law perish in God’s name for it arose in the devil’s name. Let there be no more “doctors of decrees”²¹⁶ in the world, but only “doctors of the papal chamber of the heart,”²¹⁷ that is, popish hypocrites! It is said that there is no better temporal rule anywhere than among the Turks, who have neither spiritual nor temporal law, but only their Koran. But we must admit that there is no more shameful rule than ours with its spiritual²¹⁸ and temporal law, which has resulted in nobody living according to common sense, much less according to Holy Scripture any more.

The secular law²¹⁹—God help us—has become a wilderness! Though it is much better, wiser, and more honest than the spiritual law, which has nothing good about it except its name, nevertheless, there is far too much of it. Surely, wise rulers, side by side with Holy Scripture, would be law enough. As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6[:5–6], “Is there no one among you who can judge his neighbor’s cause, that you must go to law before heathen courts?” It seems just to me that territorial laws and customs should take precedence over general imperial laws, and that the imperial laws be used only in case of necessity. Would to God that every land were ruled by its own brief laws suitable to its gifts and peculiar character. This is how these lands

²¹⁶ *Doctores decretorum.*

²¹⁷ *Doctores scrinii papalis.*

²¹⁸ I.e., canon law; cf. p. 128, n. 18.

²¹⁹ Roman law had been introduced into Germany in the twelfth century and its application became more widespread as rulers sought to establish an effective legal system in the wake of feudal decay. By the end of the fifteenth century the application of Roman law was so widespread that it became the accepted legal system of the empire. But the conditions for which this system had been designed

were ruled before these imperial laws were designed, and as many lands are still ruled without them! Rambling and farfetched laws are only a burden to the people, and they hinder cases more than they help them. But I hope that others have already given more thought and attention to this matter than I am able to do.

Our dear theologians have saved themselves worry and work. They just let the Bible alone and lecture on the sentences.²²⁰ I should have thought that the sentences ought to be the first study for young students of theology, and the Bible left to the doctors. But today it is the other way round. The Bible comes first and is then put aside when the bachelor’s degree is received. The sentences come last, and they occupy a doctor as long as he lives. There is such a solemn obligation attached to these sentences that a man who is not a priest may well lecture on the Bible, but the sentences must be lectured on by a man who is a priest. As I see it, a married man may well be a Doctor of the Bible, but under no circumstances could he be a Doctor of the Sentences. How can we prosper when we behave so wrongly and give the Bible, the holy word of God, a back seat? To make things worse, the pope commands in the strongest language that his words are to be studied in the schools and used in the courts, but very little is thought of the gospel. Consequently, the gospel lies neglected in the schools and in the courts. It is pushed aside under the bench and gathers dust so that the scandalous laws of the pope alone may have full sway.

If we bear the name and title of teachers of Holy Scripture, then by this criterion we ought to be compelled to teach the Holy Scripture and nothing else, although we all know that this high and mighty title is much too exalted for a man to take pride in it and let himself be designated a Doctor of Holy Scripture. Yet that title might be permitted if the work justified the name. But nowadays, the sentences alone dominate the situation in such a way that we find among the

were vastly different than those to which it was applied in the Middle Ages. The result was a continual conflict between Roman law and the feudal customs and remnants of Germanic legal ideas, and a state of confusion which justified Luther’s description of the law as “a wilderness.” Cf. *PE* 2, 149, n. 2.

²²⁰ “Sentences” was the title given to the textbooks on theology. Theological instruction was largely a matter of commentary on the famous book of *Sentences* by Peter Lombard, (ca. 1100–1164), renowned medieval theologian and for a short time archbishop of Paris. Cf. *PE* 2, 150, n. 1.

theologians more heathenish and humanistic²²¹ darkness than we find the holy and certain doctrine of Scripture. What are we to do about it? I know of nothing else to do than to pray humbly to God to give us such real Doctors of Theology as we have in mind. Pope, emperor, and universities may make Doctors of Arts, of Medicine, of Laws, of the Sentences; but be assured that no man can make a Doctor of Holy Scripture except the Holy Spirit from heaven. As Christ says in John 6[:45], “They must all be taught by God himself.” Now the Holy Spirit does not ask for red or brown birettas²²² or other decorations. Nor does he ask whether a person is young or old, lay or cleric, monk or secular, unmarried or married. In fact, in ancient times he actually spoke through an ass against the prophet who was riding it [Num. 22:28]. Would to God that we were worthy to have such doctors given to us, regardless of whether they were lay or cleric, married or single! They now try to force the Holy Spirit into pope, bishops, and doctors, although there is not the slightest sign or indication whatever that he is in them.

The number of books on theology must be reduced and only the best ones published. It is not many books that make men learned, nor even reading. But it is a good book frequently read, no matter how small it is, that makes a man learned in the Scriptures and godly. Indeed, the writings of all the holy fathers should be read only for a time so that through them we may be led into the Scriptures. As it is, however, we only read them these days to avoid going any further and getting into the Bible. We are like men who read the sign posts and never travel the road they indicate. Our dear fathers wanted to lead us to the Scriptures by their writings, but we use their works to get away from the Scriptures. Nevertheless, the Scripture alone is our vineyard in which we must all labor and toil.

Above all, the foremost reading for everybody, both in the universities and in the schools, should be Holy Scripture—and for the younger boys, the Gospels. And would to God that every town had a girls’ school as well, where the girls would be taught the gospel for an hour every day either in German or in Latin. Schools indeed!

²²¹ The words “heathenish” and “humanistic” are not abusive epithets. The first refers to the dominance of the heathen Aristotle in schools; the second, to the dominance of canon law and other humanly devised doctrines over the gospel.

Monasteries and nunneries began long ago with that end in view, and it was a praiseworthy and Christian purpose, as we learn from the story of St. Agnes²²³ and of other saints. Those were the days of holy virgins and martyrs when all was well with Christendom. But today these monasteries and nunneries have come to nothing but praying and singing. Is it not only right that every Christian man know the entire holy gospel by the age of nine or ten? Does he not derive his name and his life from the gospel? A spinner or a seamstress teaches her daughter her craft in her early years. But today even the great, learned prelates and the very bishops do not know the gospel.

Oh, we handle these poor young people who are committed to us for training and instruction in the wrong way! We shall have to render a solemn account of our neglect to set the word of God before them. Their lot is as described by Jeremiah in Lamentations 2 [:11–12], “My eyes are grown weary with weeping, my bowels are terrified, my heart is poured out upon the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, for the youth and the children perish in all the streets of the entire city. They said to their mothers, ‘Where is bread and wine?’ as they fainted like wounded men in the streets of the city and gave up the ghost on their mothers’ bosom.” We do not see this pitiful evil, how today the young people of Christendom languish and perish miserably in our midst for want of the gospel, in which we ought to be giving them constant instruction and training.

Moreover, even if the universities were diligent in Holy Scripture, we need not send everybody there as we do now, where their only concern is numbers and where everybody wants a doctor’s degree. We should send only the most highly qualified students who have been well trained in the lower schools. A prince or city council ought to see to this, and permit only the well qualified to be sent. I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God’s word becomes corrupt. Because of this we can see what kind of people they become in the universities and what they are like now. Nobody is to blame for this except the pope, the bishops, and the prelates, who are

²²² The biretta is a square cap worn by a teacher. Red or scarlet is the academic color of theology; brown, of the liberal arts.

²²³ Cf. p. 174, n. 147.

all charged with training young people. The universities only ought to turn out men who are experts in the Holy Scriptures, men who can become bishops and priests, and stand in the front line against heretics, the devil, and all the world. But where do you find that? I greatly fear that the universities, unless they teach the Holy Scriptures diligently and impress them on the young students, are wide gates to hell.

26.²²⁴ I know full well that the pope and his gang will pretend and boast about how the pope took the Holy Roman Empire from the Greek emperor and bestowed it upon the Germans, for which honor and benevolence he is said to have justly deserved and obtained submission, thanks, and all good things from the Germans.²²⁵ For this reason they will, perhaps, undertake to throw all attempts to reform themselves to the four winds, and will not allow us to think about anything but the bestowal of the Roman Empire. For this cause they have persecuted and oppressed many a worthy emperor so wilfully and arrogantly that it is a shame even to mention it. And with the same adroitness they have made themselves overlords of every secular power and authority, contrary to the holy gospel. I must therefore speak of this, too.

There is no doubt that the true Roman Empire, which the writings of the prophets foretold in Numbers 24[:17–19] and Daniel 2[:44], has long since been overthrown and come to an end, as Balaam clearly prophesied in Numbers 24[:24] when he said, “The Romans shall come and overthrow the Jews, and afterward they also shall be destroyed.” That happened under the Goths,²²⁶ but more particularly when the Muslim empire arose almost a thousand years ago. Then eventually Asia and Africa fell away, and in time France and Spain. Finally Venice arose, and nothing was left to Rome of its former power.

Now when the pope could not subdue to his arrogant will the Greeks and the emperor at Constantinople, who was the hereditary Roman

emperor, he invented a little device to rob this emperor of his empire and his title and to turn it over to the Germans, who at that time were warlike and of good repute. In so doing, the Romanists brought the power of the Roman Empire under their control so they could parcel it out themselves. And this is just what happened. The empire was taken away from the emperor at Constantinople, and its very name and title given to us Germans. Through this we became servants of the pope. There is now a second Roman Empire, built by the pope upon the Germans. The former Roman Empire, the first one, has long since fallen, as I said earlier.

So, then, the Roman See now gets its own way. It has taken possession of Rome, driven out the German emperor, and bound him by oaths not to dwell at Rome. He is supposed to be Roman emperor, and yet he is not to have possession of Rome; and besides, he is to be dependent on and move within the limits of the good pleasure of the pope and his supporters. We have the title, but they have the land and the city. They have always abused our simplicity to serve their own arrogant and tyrannical designs. They call us crazy Germans for letting them make fools and monkeys of us as they please.

All right! It is a small thing for God to throw empires and principalities about. He is so gentle with them that once in a while he gives a kingdom to a scoundrel and takes one from a good man, sometimes by the treachery of wicked, faithless men, and sometimes by inheritance. This is what we read about the kingdoms of Persia and Greece, and about almost all kingdoms. It says in Daniel 2[:21] and 4[:34–35], “He who rules over all things dwells in heaven, and it is he alone who overthrows kingdoms, tosses them to and fro, and establishes them.” Since no one, particularly a Christian, can think it a very great thing to have a kingdom given him, we Germans, too, need not lose our heads because a new Roman Empire is bestowed on us. For in God’s eyes it is but a trifling gift, one which he often gives to the most unworthy, as it says in Daniel 4[:35], “All who dwell on earth

²²⁴ This section did not appear in the first edition of the treatise. Luther added it to the second edition. Cf. p. 168, n. 138. Cf. also *WA* 6, 397, and *PE* 2, 59.

²²⁵ Charlemagne, king of the Franks, was crowned Roman emperor by Pope Leo III in the year 800. Although he was a German, he regarded himself as the successor of the emperors who had ruled at Rome, a fiction fostered by the popes. After this first papal coronation, the German kings were called Roman emperors. The popes of

the later Middle Ages claimed the right to bestow the imperial dignity, and Pope Clement V (1313) even claimed that in the event of a vacancy upon the throne, the pope was the possessor of the imperial power. Cf. James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (2nd ed.; New York: Macmillan Co., 1904), pp. 89–131.

²²⁶ Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in A.D. 410.

are as nothing in his eyes, and he has the power in all the kingdoms of men to give them to whom he will.”

But although the pope used violence and unjust means to rob the true emperor of his Roman Empire, or of the title of his Roman Empire, and gave it to us Germans, yet it is nevertheless certain that God has used the pope’s wickedness to give such an empire to the German nation, and after the fall of the first Roman Empire, to set up another, the one which now exists. And although we had nothing to do with this wickedness of the popes, and although we did not understand their false aims and purposes, nevertheless, we have paid tragically and far too dearly for such an empire with incalculable bloodshed, with the suppression of our liberty, the hazarding and theft of all our possessions, especially of our churches and benefices, and with the suffering of unspeakable deception and insult. We carry the title of empire, but it is the pope who has our wealth, honor, body, life, soul, and all that we possess. This is how they deceive the Germans and cheat us with tricks.²²⁷ What the popes have gladly sought was to be emperors, and when they could not achieve this, they at least succeeded in setting themselves over the emperors.

Since the empire has been given us by the providence of God as well as by the plotting of evil men, without any guilt on our part, I would not advise that we give it up, but rather that we rule it wisely and in the fear of God, as long as it pleases him for us to rule it. For, as has been said already, it does not matter to him where an empire comes from; his will is that it be governed. Though the popes were wrong in taking it from others, we were not wrong in receiving it. It has been given us through evil men by the will of God: it is the will of God we have regard for rather than the wicked intentions of the popes. Their intention when they gave it to us was to be emperors, indeed, more than emperors, and only to fool and mock us with the title. The king of Babylon also seized his kingdom by robbery and violence. Yet it was God’s will that that kingdom be ruled by the holy princes Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Michael.²²⁸ Much more, then, is it God’s will that this empire should be ruled by the Christian princes of Germany,

²²⁷ *Szo sol man die Deutschen teuschen und reit teuschen teuschenn*, an untranslatable pun on the words *Deutschen* (“German”) and *teuschenn* (“to deceive”).

no matter whether the pope stole it, got it by force, or established it fresh. It is all God’s ordering, which came about before we knew about it.

Therefore, the pope and his followers have no right to boast that they have done the German nation a great favor by giving us the Roman Empire. In the first place, they did not mean it for our good. Rather, they took advantage of our simplicity when they did it in order to strengthen their proud designs against the real Roman emperor at Constantinople. The pope took this empire against God and right, which he had no right to do. In the second place, the pope’s intention was not to give us the empire, but to get it for himself that he might bring all our power, our freedom, our wealth, our souls and bodies into subjection to himself, and through us (had God not prevented it) to subdue all the world. He clearly says so himself in his decretals, and has attempted to do so by means of many wicked wiles with a number of the German emperors. Thus have we Germans been taught our German.²²⁹ While we supposed we were going to be masters, we became in fact slaves of the most deceitful tyrants of all time. We have the name, the title, and the insignia of empire, but the pope has its treasures, authority, rights, and liberties. The pope gobbles the kernel while we are left playing with the husk!

Now may God, who, as we have said, tossed this empire into our lap by the wiles of tyrants and has charged us with its rule, help us to live up to the name, title, and insignia, and to retrieve our liberty. Let the Romanists see once and for all what it is that we have received from God through them! If they boast that they have bestowed an empire on us, let them! If that is true, then let the pope give us back Rome and all that he has gotten from the empire; let him free our land from his intolerable taxing and fleecing; let him give us back our liberty, our rights, our honor, our body and soul; and let the empire be what an empire should be, so that the pope’s words and pretensions might be fulfilled.

If he will not do that, then what is he playing at with his false and lying words and his juggler’s tricks? Has there not been enough of

²²⁸ Dan. 1:6–7; 2:48; 5:29.

²²⁹ I.e., “We Germans have been tricked.”

constantly and rudely leading this noble nation by the nose for these many centuries? It does not follow that the pope must be above the emperor because he crowns him or appoints him. The prophet St. Samuel anointed and crowned the kings Saul and David²³⁰ at God's command, and yet he was their subject. The prophet Nathan anointed King Solomon,²³¹ but he was not set over the king on that account. Similarly, St. Elisha had one of his servants anoint Jehu²³² king of Israel, but they still remained obedient and subject to the king. It has never happened in all the history of the world that he who consecrated or crowned the king was over the king, except in this single instance of the pope.

If the pope lets himself be crowned by three cardinals who are beneath him, he is nonetheless their superior. Why should he then go against his own example, against universal practice, and against the teaching of Scripture by exalting himself above temporal authority or imperial majesty simply because he crowns or consecrates the emperor? It is quite enough that he is the emperor's superior in the things of God, that is, in preaching, teaching, and the administration of the sacraments. In these respects any bishop and any priest is over everybody else, just as St. Ambrose in his see was over the emperor Theodosius,²³³ the prophet Nathan over David, and Samuel over Saul. Therefore, let the German emperor be really and truly emperor. Let neither his authority nor his power be suppressed by such sham pretensions of these papist deceivers as though they were to be excepted from his authority and were themselves to rule in all things.

27.²³⁴ Enough has now been said about the failings of the clergy, though you may find more and will find more if you look in the right place. We shall now devote a section to the failings of the temporal estate.

²³⁰ Cf. 1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Sam. 16:13.

²³¹ Cf. 1 Kings 1:39. Luther errs; Zadok the priest did the anointing.

²³² Cf. 2 Kings 9:6.

²³³ The word translated here as "see" (*stuel*) could be taken to mean the confessional stool (*Beichtstuhl*), in which case the passage would mean that Ambrose was superior to Theodosius in the confessional. The general sense would be the same, but there might be a historical allusion to Theodosius' massacre of seven thousand men, for which he was compelled to do public penance. Cf. WA 6, 465, n. 1.

In the first place, there is a great need for a general law and decree in the German nation against extravagant and costly dress, because of which so many nobles and rich men are impoverished.²³⁵ God has certainly given us, as he has to other countries, enough wool, hair, flax, and everything else necessary for the seemly and honorable dress of every class. We do not need to waste fantastic sums for silk, velvet, golden ornaments, and foreign wares. I believe that even if the pope had not robbed us with his intolerable fleecing, we would still have more than enough of these domestic robbers, the silk and velvet merchants. We see that now everybody wants to be like everybody else, and pride and envy are thereby aroused and increased among us, as we deserve. All this misery and much more besides would be happily left behind if only our desire to be noticed would let us be thankful and satisfied with the good things God has already given us.

It is also necessary to restrict the spice traffic,²³⁶ which is another of the great ships in which money is carried out of German lands. By the grace of God more things to eat and drink grow in our own land than in any other, and they are just as nourishing and good. Perhaps my proposals seem foolish, impractical, and give the impression that I want to ruin the greatest of all trades, that of commerce. But I am doing my best, and if there is no improvement in these matters, then let him who will try his hand at improving them. I do not see that many good customs have ever come to a land through commerce, and in ancient times God made his people Israel dwell away from the sea on this account, and did not let them engage in much commerce.

But the greatest misfortune of the German nation is certainly the *zynskauf*.²³⁷ If that did not exist many a man would have to leave his silks, velvets, golden ornaments, spices, and display of every kind unbought. This traffic has not existed much longer than a hundred

²³⁴ This section followed immediately after section 25 in the first edition and was numbered 26. Cf. WA 6, 465, n. 2.

²³⁵ Such a law was proposed to the Diet of Worms in 1521. Cf. PE 2, 158, n. 2.

²³⁶ Spices were one of the chief articles of foreign commerce in the sixteenth century. The discovery of the Gape route to India had given the Portuguese a practical monopoly of this trade. A comparative statement of the cost of spices over a period of years was reported to the Diet of Nürnberg (1523). Cf. PE 2, 159, n. 1.

²³⁷ 237 Cf. p. 96, n. 61. Cf. also Benrath's extensive discussion of the significance of this passage in *op. cit.*, p. 109, n. 99.

years, and it has already brought almost all princes, endowed institutions, cities, nobles, and their heirs to poverty, misery, and ruin. If it goes on for another hundred years, Germany will not have a penny left, and the chances are we shall have to eat one another. The devil invented the practice, and by confirming it²³⁸ the pope has brought woe upon the whole world.

Therefore, I beg and pray at this point that everyone open his eyes and see the ruin of his children and heirs. Ruin is not just at the door, it is already in the house. I pray and beseech emperor, princes, lords, and city councilors to condemn this trade as speedily as possible and prevent it from now on, regardless of whether the pope with all his law—“unlaw” rather—objects or whether benefices or monasteries are based upon it. It is better for a city to have one benefice supported by honest legacies or revenue than to have a hundred benefices supported by *zynskauf*. Indeed, a benefice supported by a *zynskauf* is more grievous and oppressive than twenty supported by legacies. In fact, the *zynskauf* must be a sign and proof that the world has been sold to the devil because of its grievous sins and that at the same time we are losing both temporal and spiritual possessions. And yet we do not even notice it.

In this connection, we must put a bit in the mouth of the Fuggers²³⁹ and similar companies. How is it possible in the lifetime of one man to accumulate such great possessions, worthy of a king, legally and according to God’s will? I don’t know. But what I really cannot understand is how a man with one hundred gulden can make a profit of twenty in one year. Nor, for that matter, can I understand how a man with one gulden can make another—and all this not from tilling the soil or raising cattle, where the increase of wealth depends not on human wit but on God’s blessing. I leave this to men who understand the ways of the world. As a theologian I have no further reproof to make on this subject except that it has an evil and offending appearance, about which St. Paul says, “Avoid every appearance or show of evil” [1 Thess. 5:22]. I know full well that it would be a far

more godly thing to increase agriculture and decrease commerce. I also know that those who work on the land and seek their livelihood from it according to the Scriptures do far better. All this was said to us and to everybody else in the story of Adam, “Cursed be the ground when you work it; it shall bear you thistles and thorns, and in the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread” [Gen. 3:17–19]. There is still a lot of land lying unworked and neglected.

Next comes the abuse of eating and drinking,²⁴⁰ which gives us Germans a bad reputation in foreign lands, as though it were a special vice of ours. Preaching cannot stop it, so deeply is it rooted and so firmly has it got the upper hand. The waste of money would be its least evil, were it not followed by all the vices that accompany it—murder, adultery, stealing, blasphemy, and every other form of immorality. Government can do something to prevent it; otherwise, what Christ says will come to pass, that the last day shall come like a secret snare, when they shall be eating and drinking, marrying and wooing, building and planting, buying and selling.²⁴¹ It is so much like what is now going on that I sincerely hope the day of judgment is at hand, although very few people give it any thought.

Finally, is it not lamentable that we Christians tolerate open and common brothels in our midst, when all of us are baptized unto chastity? I know perfectly well what some say to this, that is, that it is not a custom peculiar to one nation, that it would be difficult to put a stop to it, and, moreover, that it is better to keep such a house than that married women, or girls, or others of still more honorable estate should be outraged. Nevertheless, should not the government, which is temporal and also Christian, realize that such evil cannot be prevented by that kind of heathenish practice? If the children of Israel could exist without such an abomination, why cannot Christians do as much? In fact, how do so many cities, country towns, market towns, and villages do without such houses? Why can’t large cities do without them as well?

²³⁸ The *zynskauf* was legalized by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1512. Cf. Benrath, *op. cit.*, 109, n. 99, and *MA* 2, 401.

²³⁹ See p. 155, n. 100.

²⁴⁰ The diets of Augsburg (1500) and Cologne (1512) had passed edicts against drunkenness. The Diet of Worms (1521) adjourned before a recommendation that these earlier edicts be reaffirmed could be acted upon. Cf. *PE* 2, 161, n. 1.

²⁴¹ Luther may have had in mind such passages as Luke 21:34; 12:45, and Matt. 24:36–44.

In this matter of brothels, and in other matters previously mentioned, I have tried to point out how many good works the temporal government could do, and what the duty of every government should be, so that everyone may learn what an awful responsibility it is to rule and sit in high places. What use would it be if an overlord were as holy in his own life as St. Peter, if he did not diligently try to help his subjects in these matters? His very authority will condemn him. It is the duty of authorities to seek the best for those they govern. But if the authorities were to give some thought to how young people might be brought together in marriage, the hope of marriage would greatly help every one of them to endure and resist temptation.

But today everybody is attracted to the priesthood or the monastic life, and among them, I am sorry to say, there is not one in a hundred who has any other reason than that he seeks a living and doubts that he will ever be able to support himself and a family. Therefore, they live wildly enough beforehand, and wish, as they say, to get it out of their system, but experience shows that it is only more deeply embedded in them. I find the proverb true, “Despair makes most monks and priests.”²⁴² That is what happens and that is how it is, as we see.

I will, however, sincerely advise that to avoid the many sins which entice so shamelessly, neither youth nor maid should be bound by the vow of chastity or a vow to adopt the religious life before the age of thirty.²⁴³ Chastity, as St. Paul says, is a special gift [1 Cor. 7:7]. Therefore, I would advise those upon whom God has not conferred his special gift not to enter religious orders or take the vows. Furthermore, I say that if you trust God so little that you cannot support yourself as a married man and wish to become a religious only because of this distrust, then I beg you for your own soul’s sake not to become a religious at all, but rather a farmer or anything you like. For where a single measure of faith in God is needed to earn your daily bread, there must be ten times that amount of faith to remain a religious. If you do not trust God to support you in temporal things, how will you trust him

²⁴² *Desperatio facit monachum*. Cf. Burton Stevenson (ed.), *The Home Book of Proverbs, Maxims, and Familiar Phrases* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 1619.

²⁴³ In the *Discussion of Confession (Confitendi Ratio)* (1520) Luther sets the minimum age for men at eighteen or twenty, and for women at fifteen or sixteen (WA

to support you in spiritual things? Alas, unbelief and distrust spoil everything and lead us into all kinds of misery, as we see in all walks of life.

Much more could be said of this pitiable state of affairs. The young people have nobody to look after them. They all do as they please, and the government is as much use to them as if it never existed. And yet the care of young people ought to be the chief concern of the pope, bishops, the ruling classes, and of the councils. They want to exercise authority far and wide, and yet they help nobody. For just this reason a lord and ruler will be a rare sight in heaven, even though he build a hundred churches for God and raise up all the dead!

That is enough for the moment. [I think I have said enough in my little book *Treatise on Good Works*²⁴⁴ about what the secular authorities and the nobility ought to do. There is certainly room for improvement in their lives and in their rule, yet the abuses of the temporal power are not to be compared with those of the spiritual power, as I have shown in that book.]²⁴⁵

I know full well that I have been very outspoken. I have made many suggestions that will be considered impractical. I have attacked many things too severely. But how else ought I to do it? I am duty-bound to speak. If I had the power, these are the things I would do. I would rather have the wrath of the world upon me than the wrath of God. The world can do no more to me than take my life. In the past I have made frequent overtures of peace to my enemies, but as I see it, God has compelled me through them to keep on opening my mouth wider and wider and to give them enough to say, bark, shout, and write because they have nothing else to do. Well, I know another little song about Rome and the Romanists.²⁴⁶ If their ears are itching to hear it, I will sing that one to them, too—and pitch it in the highest key! You understand what I mean, dear Rome.

6, 159–169). Cf. *PE* 1, 100. In *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows* (1521) Luther sets the minimum age at sixty. Cf. in this volume, pp. 387–388.

²⁴⁴ Cf. in this volume, pp. 15–114.

²⁴⁵ The bracketed sentences did not appear in the first edition.

²⁴⁶ This little song is *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), written shortly after the present treatise was published. LW 36, 3–126.

Moreover, many times have I offered my writings for investigation and hearing, but to no avail. Nevertheless, I know full well that if my cause is just, it must be condemned on earth and be justified only by Christ in heaven, for all the Scriptures show that the cause of Christians and of Christendom must be judged by God alone. Moreover, no cause has ever yet been justified on earth by men because the opposition has always been too great and too strong. It is still my greatest concern and anxiety that my cause may not be condemned, by which I would know for certain that it is not yet pleasing to God.

Therefore, just let them go hard at it, pope, bishop, priest, monk, or scholar. They are just the ones to persecute the truth, as they have always done.

God give us all a Christian mind, and grant to the Christian nobility of the German nation in particular true spiritual courage to do the best they can for the poor church. Amen.

Wittenberg, in the year 1520.