

COLLECTION

An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation

Martin Luther

3 texts

Downloaded from The Stromata (thestromata.com). Free for personal, educational, and ministry use.

CONTENTS

1. The Three Walls of the Romanists
2. Abuses to Be Discussed in Councils
3. Proposals for Reform

The Three Walls of the Romanists

Martin Luther

Lutheran · Reformation · Treatise

STROMATA 207

INTRODUCTION

In 1520, Martin Luther addressed the German princes directly, having given up on Rome's own capacity for self-correction. Here he identifies the three defenses - spiritual immunity from temporal law, exclusive papal authority to interpret Scripture, exclusive papal authority to call a council - that had, in his view, shielded the church hierarchy from any reform for centuries. He dismantles each with a mix of biblical argument and blunt polemic, then turns to specifics: the papal court's finances, the sale of benefices, the crown worn by a man who claims to follow a crucified Lord. The tone is urgent and combative throughout - this is Luther writing not as a theologian in his study but as a man trying to set a fire before it can be smothered.

Chapter I: The Three Walls of the Romanists

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

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

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

Josh. 6:20 Now God help us, and give us one of the trumpets with which the walls of Jericho were overthrown, that we may blow down these walls of straw and paper, and may set free the Christian rods

for the punishment of sin, bringing to light the craft and deceit of the devil, to the end that through punishment we may reform ourselves, and once more attain God's favor. Against the first wall we will direct our first attack.

It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the "spiritual estate"; princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the "temporal estate." That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy. Yet no one should be frightened by it; and for this reason -- viz., that all Christians are truly of the "spiritual estate," and there is among them no difference at all but that of office, as Paul says in I Corinthians 12:12, We are all one body, yet every member has its own work, where by it serves every other, all because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all alike Christians; for baptism, Gospel and faith alone make us "spiritual" and a Christian people.

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

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

Since, then, the temporal authorities are baptized with the same baptism and have the same faith and Gospel as we, we must grant that they are priests and bishops, and count their office one which has a proper and a useful place in the Christian community. For whoever comes out the water of baptism can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop and pope, though it is not seemly that every one should exercise the office. Nay, just because we are all in like manner priests, no one must put himself forward and undertake, without our consent and election, to do what is in the power of all of us. For what is common to all, no one dare take upon himself without the will and the command of

the community; and should it happen that one chosen for such an office were deposed for malfeasance, he would then be just what he was before he held office. Therefore a priest in Christendom is nothing else than an office-holder. While he is in office, he has precedence; when deposed, he is a peasant or a townsman like the rest. Beyond all doubt, then, a priest is no longer a priest when he is deposed. But now they have invented characters indelebilis, and prate that a deposed priest is nevertheless something different from a mere layman. They even dream that a priest can never become a layman, or be anything else than a priest. All this is mere talk and man-made law.

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

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

See, now, how Christian is the decree which says that the temporal power is not above the "spiritual estate" and may not punish it. That is as much as to say that the hand shall lend no aid when the eye is suffering. Is it not unnatural, not to say unchristian, that one member should not help another and prevent its destruction? Verily, the more honorable the member, the more should the others help. I say then, since the temporal power is ordained of God to punish evil-doers and to protect them that do well, it should therefore be left free to perform its office without hindrance through the whole body of Christendom without respect of persons, whether it affect pope, bishops, priests, monks, nuns or anybody else. For if the mere fact that the temporal power has a smaller place among The Christian offices than has the office of preachers or confessors, or of the clergy, then the tailors, cobblers, masons, carpenters, pot-boys, tapsters, farmers, and all the secular tradesmen, should also be prevented from providing pope, bishops, priests and monks with shoes, clothing, houses, meat and drink, and from paying them tribute. But if these laymen are allowed to do their work unhindered, what do the Roman scribes mean by their laws, with which they withdraw themselves from the jurisdiction of the temporal Christian power, only so that they may be free to do evil and to fulfill what St. Peter has said: 2. Peter 2:1 "There shall be false teachers among you, and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you."

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

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

Again, it is intolerable that in the canon law so much importance is attached to the freedom, life and property of the clergy, as though the laity were not also as spiritual as good Christians as they, or did not belong to the Church. Why are your life and limb, your property and honor so free, and mine not? We are all alike Christians, and have baptism, faith, Spirit and all things alike. If a priest is killed, the land is laid under interdict, -- why not when a peasant is killed? Whence comes this great distinction between those who are equally Christians? Only from human laws and inventions!

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

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

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

The second wall is still more flimsy and worthless. They wish to be the only Masters of The Holy Scriptures, even though in all their lives they learn nothing from them. They assume for themselves sole authority, and with insolent juggling of words they would persuade us that the pope, whether he be a bad man or a good man, cannot err in matters of faith, and yet they cannot prove a single letter of it. Hence it comes that so many heretical and unchristian, nay, even unnatural ordinances have a place in the canon law, of which, however, there is no present need to speak. For since they think that the Holy Spirit never leaves them, be they never so unlearned and wicked, they make bold to decree whatever they will. And if it were true, where would be the need or use of Holy Scriptures? Let us burn them, and be satisfied with the unlearned lords at Rome, who are possessed of the Holy Spirit, -- although He can possess only pious hearts! Unless I had read it myself, I could not have believed that the devil would make such clumsy pretensions at Rome, and find a following.

But not to fight them with mere words, we will quote the Scriptures. St. Paul says in I Corinthians 14:30: "If to anyone something better is revealed, though he be sitting and listening to another in God's Word, then the first, who is speaking, shall hold his peace and give place." What would be the use of this commandment, if we were only to believe him who does the talking or who has the highest seat?

Christ also says in John 6:45, that all Christians shall be taught of God. Thus it may well happen that the pope and his followers are wicked men, and no true Christians, not taught of God, not having true understanding. On the other hand, an ordinary man may have true understanding; why then should we not follow him? Has not the pope erred many times? Who would help Christendom when the pope errs, if we were not to believe another, who had the Scriptures on his side, more than the pope?

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

Only think of it yourself! They must confess that there are pious Christians among us, who have the true faith, Spirit, understanding, word and mind of Christ. Why, then, should we reject their word and understanding and follow the pope, who has neither faith nor Spirit? That would be to deny the whole faith and the Christian Church. Moreover, it is not the pope alone who is always in the right, if the article of The Creed is correct: "I believe one holy Christian Church"; otherwise the prayer must run: "I believe in the pope at Rome," and so reduce the Christian Church to one man, -- which would be nothing else than a devilish and hellish error.

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

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

The third wall falls of itself when the first two are down. For when the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by the Scriptures, to reprove him, and to constrain him, according to the

word of Christ in Matthew 18:15: "If thy brother sin against thee, go and tell it him between thee and him alone; if he hear thee not, then take with thee one or two more; if he hear them not, tell it to the Church; if he hear not the Church, consider him a heathen." Here every member is commanded to care for every other. How much rather should we do this when the member that does evil is a ruling member, and by his evil-doing is the cause of much harm and offense to the rest! But if I am to accuse him before the Church, I must bring the Church together.

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

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

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

But all their boasts of an authority which dare not opposed amount to nothing after all. No one in Christendom has authority to do injury, or to forbid the resisting of injury. There is no authority in the Church save edification. Therefore, if the pope were to use his authority to prevent the calling of a free council, and thus became a hindrance to the edification of the Church, we should have regard neither for him nor for his authority; and if he were to hurl his bans and thunderbolts, we should despise his conduct as that of a madman, and relying on God, hurl back the ban on him, and coerce him as best we could. For this presumptuous authority of his is nothing; he has no such authority, and he is quickly overthrown by a text of Scripture; for Paul says to the Corinthians, II Corinthians 10:8 "God has given us authority not for the destruction, but for the edification of Christendom." Who is ready to overleap

this text? It is only the power of the devil and of Antichrist which resists the things that serve for the edification of Christendom; it is, therefore, in no wise to be obeyed, but is to be opposed with life and goods and all our strength.

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

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

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

Chapter II: Abuses to Be Discussed in Councils

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

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

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

What is the use in Christendom of those people who are called the cardinals? I shall tell you. Italy and Germany have many rich monasteries, foundations, benefices, and livings. No better way has been discovered to bring all these to Rome than by creating cardinals and giving them the bishoprics, monasteries and prelacies, and so overthrowing the worship of God. For this reason we now see Italy a very wilderness -- monasteries in ruins, bishoprics devoured, the prelacies and the revenues of all the churches drawn to Rome, cities decayed, land and people laid waste, because there is no more worship or preaching. Why? The cardinals must have the income. No Turk could have so devastated Italy and suppressed the worship of God. Now that Italy is sucked dry, they come into Germany, and begin oh, so gently. But let us beware, or Germany will soon become like Italy. Already we have some cardinals; what the Romans seek by that the "drunken Germans" are not to understand until we have not a bishopric, a monastery, a living, a benefice, a heller or a pfennig left. Antichrist must take the treasures of the earth, as it was prophesied. So it goes on. They skim the cream off the bishoprics, monasteries and benefices, and because they do not yet venture to turn them all to shameful use, as they have done in Italy, they only practice for the present the sacred trickery of coupling together ten or twenty prelacies and taking a yearly portion from each of them, so as to make a tidy sum after all. The priory of Wurzburg yields a thousand gulden; that of Bamberg something; Mainz, Trier and the others, something more; and so from one to ten thousand gulden might be got together, in order that a cardinal might live at Rome like a rich king. "After they are used to this, we will create thirty or forty cardinals in a day, and give to one Mount St. Michael at Bamberg and the bishopric of Wurzburg to boot, hang on to these a few rich livings, until churches and cities are waste, and after that we will say, 'We are Christ's vicars and shepherds of Christ's sheep; the mad, drunken Germans must put up with it.'" I advise, however, that the number of the cardinals be reduced, or that the pope be made to keep them at his own expense. Twelve of them would be more than enough, and each of them might have an income of a thousand gulden a year. How comes it that we Germans must put up with such robbery and such extortion of our property, at the hands of the pope? If the Kingdom of France has prevented it, why do we Germans let them make such fools and apes of us? It would all be more bearable if in this way they only stole our property; but they lay waste the churches and rob Christ's sheep of their pious

shepherds, and destroy the worship and the Word of God. Even if there were not a single cardinal, the Church would not go under. As it is they do nothing for the good of Christendom; they only wrangle about the incomes of bishoprics and prelacies, and that any robber could do.

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

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

In former times German emperors and princes permitted the pope to receive the annates from all the benefices of the German nation, i.e., the half of the first year's revenues from each benefice. This permission was given, however, in order that by means of these large sums of money, the pope might accumulate a treasure for fighting against the Turks and infidels in defense of Christendom, so that the burden of the war might not rest too heavily upon the nobility, but that the clergy also should contribute something toward it. This single-hearted devotion of the German nation the popes have so used, that they have received this money for more than a hundred years, have now made of it a binding tax and tribute, and have not only accumulated no treasure, but have used the money to endow many orders and offices at Rome, and to provide these offices with salaries, as though the annates were a fixed rent. When they pretend that they are about to fight against the Turks, they send out emissaries to gather money. Oft-times they issue an indulgence on this same pretext of fighting the Turks, for they think the mad Germans are forever to remain utter and arrant fools, give them money without end, and satisfy their unspeakable greed; though we clearly see that not a heller of the annates or of the indulgence-money or of all the rest, is used against the Turks, but all of it goes into the bottomless bag. They lie and deceive, make laws and make agreements with us, and they do not intend to keep any of them. All this must be counted the work of Christ and St. Peter! Now, in this matter the German nation, bishops and princes, should consider that they too are Christians, and should protect the people, whom they are set to rule and guard in things temporal and spiritual, against these ravening wolves who, in sheep's clothing, pretend to be shepherds and rulers; and, since the annates are so shamefully abused and the stipulated conditions are not fulfilled, they should not permit their land and people to be so sadly robbed and ruined, against all justice; but by a law of the emperor or of the whole nation, they should either keep the annates at home or else abolish them again. For since the Romans do not keep the terms of the agreement, they have no right to the annates. Therefore the bishops and princes are bound to punish or prevent; such thievery and robbery, as the law requires. In this they should aid the pope and support him, for he is perchance too weak to prevent such an abuse all by himself; or if he were to undertake to defend and maintain this practice, they ought resist him and fight against him as against a wolf and a tyrant, for he has no authority to do or to defend evil. Moreover, if it were ever desired to accumulate such a treasure against the Turks, we ought in the future to have sense enough to see that the German nation would be a better custodian for it than the pope; for the German nation has people enough for the fighting, if only the money is forthcoming. It is with the annates as it has been with many another Roman pretence. Again, the year has been so divided between the pope and the ruling bishops and canons, that the pope has six months in the year -- every other month -- in which to bestow the benefices which fall vacant in his months. In this way almost all the benefices are absorbed by Rome, especially the very best livings and dignities, and when once they fall into the hands of Rome, they never come out of them again, though a vacancy may never again occur in the pope's month. Thus the canons are cheated. This is a genuine robbery, which intends to let nothing escape. Therefore it is high time that the "papal months" be altogether abolished, and that everything which they have brought to Rome be taken back again. For the princes and nobles should take measures that the stolen goods be returned, the thieves punished, and those who have abused privilege be deprived of privilege. If it is binding and valid when the pope on the day after his election makes, in his chancery, rules and laws whereby our foundations and livings are robbed, -- a thing which he has no right to do; then it should

be still more valid if the Emperor Charles on the day after his coronation were to make rules and laws that not another benefice or living in all Germany shall be allowed to come into the hands of Rome by means of the "papal months," and that the livings which have already fallen into its hands shall be released, and redeemed from the Roman robbers; for he has this right by virtue of his office and his sword.

But now the Roman See of Avarice and Robbery has not been able to await the time when all the benefices, one after another, would, by the "papal months," come into its power, but hastens, with insatiable appetite, to get possession of them all as speedily as possible; and so besides the annates and the "months" it has hit upon a device by which benefices and livings fall to Rome in three ways: First, If any one who holds a free living dies at Rome or on the way to Rome, his living must forever belong to the Roman-I should rather say the robbing-See; and yet they will not be called robbers; though they are guilty of such robbery as no one has ever heard or read about. Second, In case any one who belongs to the household of the pope or of the cardinals holds or takes over a benefice, or in case one who already holds a benefice afterwards enters the "household" of the pope or of a cardinal; but who can count the "household" of the pope and of the cardinals, when the pope, if he only goes on a pleasure-ride, takes with him three or four thousand mule-riders, eclipsing all emperors and kings? Christ and St. Peter went on foot in order that their vicars might have the more pomp and splendor. Now avarice has cleverly thought out another scheme, and brings it to pass that even here many; have the name of "papal servant," just as though they were in Rome; all in order that in every place the mere rascally little word "papal servant" may bring all benefices to Rome and tie them fast there forever. Are not these vexatious and devilish inventions? Let us beware! Soon Mainz; Madgeburg and Halberstadt will gently pass into the hands of Rome, and the cardinalate will be paid for dearly enough. "Afterwards we will make all the German bishops cardinal so that there will be nothing left outside." Third, When a contest has started at Rome over a benefice. This I hold to be almost the commonest and widest road for bringing livings to Rome. For when there is no contest at home, unnumbered knaves will be found at Rome to dig up contests out of the earth and assail livings at their will. Thus many a good priest has to lose his living, or settle the contest for a time by the payment of a sum of money. Such a living rightly or wrongly contested must also belong forever to the Roman See. It would be no wonder if God were to rain from heaven fire and brimstone and to sink Rome in the abyss, as He did Sodom and Gomorrah of old. Why should there be a pope in Christendom, if his power is used for nothing else than such archknavery, and if he protects and practices it? O noble princes and lords, how long will ye leave your lands and people naked to these ravening wolves!

Since even these practices were not enough, and Avarice grew impatient at the long time it took to get hold of all the bishoprics, therefore my Lord Avarice devised the fiction that the bishoprics should be nominally abroad, but that their land and soil should be at Rome, and no bishop can be confirmed unless with a great sum of money he buy the pallium, and bind himself with terrible oaths to the pope's servant. This is the reason that no bishop ventures to act against the pope. That, too, is what the Romans were seeking when they imposed the oath, and thus the very richest bishoprics have fallen into debt and ruin. Mainz pays, as I hear, 20,000 gulden. These be your Romans! To be sure they decreed of old in the canon law that the pallium should be bestowed gratis, the number of papal servants diminished, the contest lessened, the chapters and bishops allowed their liberty. But this did not bring in money, and so they turned over a new leaf, and all authority was taken from the bishops and chapters; they are made ciphers, and have no office nor authority nor work, but everything is ruled by the archknives at Rome; soon they will have in hand even the office of sexton and bell-ringer in all the churches. All contests are brought to Rome, and by authority of the pope everyone does as he likes. What happened this very year? The Bishop of Strassburg wished to govern his chapter properly and to institute reforms in worship, and with this end in view made certain godly and Christian regulations. But my dear Lord Pope and the Holy Roman See, at the instigation of the priests, overthrew and altogether condemned this holy and spiritual ordinance. This is called "feeding the sheep of Christ!" Thus priests are to be encouraged against their own bishop, and their disobedience to divine law is to be protected! Antichrist himself, I hope, will not dare to put God to such open shame! There you have your pope after your own heart! Why did he do this? Ah! if one church were reformed, it would be a dangerous departure; Rome's turn too might come! Therefore it were better that no priest should be left at peace with another, that kings and princes should be set at odds, as has been the custom heretofore, and the world filled with the blood of Christians, only so the concord of Christians should not trouble the Holy Roman See with a reformation. So far we have been getting an idea of how they deal with livings which become vacant. But for tender-hearted Avarice the vacancies are too few, and so he brings his foresight to bear upon the benefices which are still occupied by their incumbents, so that they must be unfilled., even they are not unfilled. And this he does in many ways, as follows: First, He lies in wait for fat prebends or bishoprics which are held by an old or a sick man, or by one with an alleged disability. To such an incumbent, without his desire or consent, the Holy See gives a coadjutor's i.e., an "assistant," for the coadjutor's benefit, because he is "papal servant," or has paid for the position, or has earned it by some other ignoble service to Rome. In this case the rights of the chapter or the rights of him who has the bestowal of the living must be surrendered, and the whole thing fall into the hands of Rome. Second, There is a little word commend, by which the pope entrusts the keeping of a rich, fat monastery or church to a cardinal or to another oh his people, just as though I were to give you a hundred gulden to keep. This is not called the giving or bestowing of the monastery nor even its destruction, or the abolition of the worship of God, but only "giving it into keeping"; not that he to whom it is entrusted is to care for it, or build it up, but he is to drive out the incumbent, to receive the goods and revenues, and to install some apostate, renegade monk, who accepts five or six gulden a year and sits in the church all day selling pictures and images to the pilgrims, so that henceforth neither prayers nor masses are said there. If this were to be called destroying monasteries and abolishing the worship of God, then the pope would have to be called a destroyer of Christendom and an abolisher

of God's worship, because this is his constant practice. That would be a hard saying at Rome, and so we must call it a commend or a "command to take charge" of the monastery. The pope can every year make commends out of four or more of these monasteries, a single one of which may have an income of more than six thousand gulden. This is the way the Romans increase the worship of God and preserve the monasteries. The Germans also are beginning to find it out. Third, There are some benefices which they call incompatibilia, and which, according to the ordinances of the canon law, cannot be held by one man at the same time, as for instance, two parishes, two bishoprics and the like. In these cases the Holy Roman See of Avarice evades the canon law by making "glosses," called unio and incorporatio, i.e., by "incorporating" many incompatibilia, so that each becomes a part of every other and all of them together are looked upon as though they were one living. They are then no longer "incompatible," and the holy canon law is satisfied, in that it is no longer binding, except upon those who do not buy these "glosses" from the pope or his datarius. The unio, i.e., "uniting," is of the same nature. The pope binds many such benefices together like a bundle of sticks, and by virtue of this bond they are all regarded as one benefice. So there is at Rome one courtesan who holds, for himself alone, 22 parishes, 7 priories and 44 canonries besides, -- all by the help of that masterly "gloss," which holds that this is not illegal. What cardinals and other prelates have, everyone may imagine for himself. In this way the Germans are to have their purses eased and their itch cured. Another of the "glosses" is the administratio, i.e., a man may have beside his bishopric, an abbacy or a dignity, and possess all the property which goes with it, only he has no other title than that of "administrator." For at Rome it is sufficient that words are changed and not the things they stand for; as though I were to teach that a bawdy-house keeper should have the name of "burgomaster's wife," and yet continue to ply her trade. This kind of Roman rule St. Peter foretold when he said, in II Peter 2:3: "There shall come false teachers, who in covetousness, with feigned words, shall make merchandise of you, to get their gains." Again, dear Roman Avarice has invented the custom of selling and bestowing livings to such advantage that the seller or disposer retains reversionary rights, upon them; to wit, if the incumbent dies, the benefice freely reverts to him who previously sold, bestowed or surrendered it. In this way they have made livings hereditary property, so that henceforth no one can come into possession of them, except the man to whom the seller is willing to dispose of them, or to whom he bequeaths his rights at death. Besides, there are many who transfer to others the mere title to a benefice from which those who get the title derive not a heller of income. It is now an old custom, too, to give another man a benefice and to reserve a certain part out of the annual revenue. In olden times this was simony. Of these things there are so many more that they cannot all be counted. They treat livings more shamefully than the heathen beneath the cross treated the garments of Christ. Yet all that has hitherto been said is ancient history and an every-day occurrence at Rome. Avarice has devised one thing more, which may, I hope, be his last morsel, and choke him. The pope has a noble little device called pectoralis reservatio, i.e., his "mental reservation," and proprius motus, i.e., the "arbitrary will of his authority." It goes like this. When one man has gotten a benefice at Rome, and the appointment has been regularly signed and sealed, according to custom, and there comes another, who brings money, or has laid the pope under obligation in some other way, of which we will not speak, and desires of the pope the same benefice, then the pope takes it from the first man and gives it to the second. If it is said that this is unjust, then the Most Holy Father must make some excuse, that he may not be reproved for doing such open violence to the law, and says that in his mind

and heart he had reserved that benefice to himself and his own plenary disposal, although he had never before in his whole life either thought or heard of it. Thus he has now found a little "gloss" by which he can, in his own person, lie and deceive, and make a fool and an ape of anybody -- all this he does brazenly and openly, and yet he wishes to be the head of Christendom, though with his open lies he lets the Evil Spirit rule him. This arbitrary will and lying "reservation" of the pope creates in Rome a state of affairs which is unspeakable. There is buying, selling, bartering, trading, trafficking, lying, deceiving, robbing, stealing, luxury, harlotry, knavery, and every sort of contempt of God, and even the rule of Antichrist could not be more scandalous. Venice, Antwerp, Cairo are nothing compared to this fair which is held at Rome and the business which is done there, except that in those other places they still observe and reason. At Rome everything goes as the devil wills, and out of this ocean like virtue flows into all the world. Is it a wonder that such people fear a reformation and a free council, and prefer to set all kings and princes at enmity rather than have them unite and bring about a council? Who could bear to have such knavery exposed if it were his own? Finally, for all this noble commerce the pope has built a warehouse, namely, the house of the datarius, in Rome. Thither all must come who deal after this fashion in benefices and livings. From him they must buy their "glosses" and get the power to practice such archknavery. In former times Rome was generous, and then justice had either to be bought or else suppressed with money, but now she has become exorbitant, and no one dare be a knave unless with a great sum he has first bought the right. If that is not a brothel above all the brothels one can imagine, then I do not know what brothel means. If you have money in this house, then you can come by all the things I have said; and not only these, but all sort of usury are here made honest, for a consideration, and the possession of all property acquired by theft or robbery is legalized. Here vows are dissolved; here monks at granted liberty to leave their orders; here marriage is on sale to the clergy; here bastards can become legitimate; here all dishonor and shame can come to honor; all ill repute and stigma of evil are here knighted and ennobled here is permitted the marriage which is within the forbidden degrees or has some other defect. Oh! what a taxing and a robbing rules there! It looks as though all the laws of the Church were made for one purpose only -- to be nothing but so many money-snares, from which a man must extricate himself, if he would be a Christian. Yea, here the devil becomes a saint, and a god to boot. What heaven and earth cannot, that this house can do! They call them compositions! "Compositions" indeed! rather "confusions"! Oh, what a modest tax is the Rhine-toll, compared with the tribute taken by this holy house! Let no one accuse me of exaggeration! It is all so open that even at Rome they must confess the evil to be greater and more terrible than any one can say. I have not yet stirred up the hell-broth of personal vices, nor do I intend to do so. I speak of things which are common talk, and yet I have not words to tell them all. The bishops, the priests and, above all, the doctors in the universities, who draw their salaries for this purpose, should have done their duty and with common consent have written and cried out against these things; but they have done the very opposite. There remains one last word, and I must say that too. Since boundless Avarice has not been satisfied with all these treasures, which three great kings might well think sufficient, he now begins to transfer this trade and sell it to Fugger of Augsburg, so that the lending and trading and buying of bishoprics and benefices, and the driving of bargains in spiritual goods has now come to the right place, and spiritual and temporal goods have become one business. And now I would fain hear of a mind so lofty that it could imagine what this Roman Avarice might yet be able to do and has not already done; unless Fugger were to transfer or

sell this combination of two lines of business to somebody else. I believe we have reached the limit. As for what they have stolen in all lands and still steal and extort, by means of indulgences, bulls, letters of confession, "butter-letters" and other confessionalia, -- all this I consider mere patch-work, and like casting a single devil more into hell. Not that they bring in little, for a mighty king could well support himself on their returns, but they are not to be compared with the streams of treasure above mentioned. I shall also say nothing at present of how this indulgence money has been applied. Another time I shall inquire about that, for Campoflore, and Belvidere and certain other places probably know something about it. Since, then, such devilish rule is not only open robbery and deceit, and the tyranny of the gates of hell, but also ruins Christendom in body and soul, it is our duty to use all diligence in protecting Christendom against such misery and destruction. If we would fight the Turks, let us make a beginning here, where they are at their worst. If we justly hang thieves and behead robbers, why should we let Roman Avarice go free? For he is the greatest thief and robber that has come or can come into the world, and all in the holy Name of Christ and of St. Peter! Who can longer endure it or keep silence? Almost everything he owns has been gotten by theft and robbery; that is the truth, and all history shows it. The pope never got by purchase such great properties that from his office alone he can raise about a million ducats, not to mention the mines of treasure named above and the income of his lands. Nor did it come to him by inheritance from Christ or from St. Peter; no one ever loaned it or gave it to him; it has not become his by virtue of immemorial use and enjoyment. Tell me, then, whence he can have it? Learn from this what they have in mind when they send out legates to collect money for use against the Turks.

Source: Translated by C. M. Jacobs, in *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915).

Previously prepared for an earlier version of *The Stromata*. Accessed July 2026.

Translation: Author died 1546. Jacobs' 1915 Philadelphia Edition translation, confirmed public domain via publication date and verbatim phrase match against Project Wittenberg. Not the copyrighted *Luther's Works American Edition* (Fortress Press) - confirmed distinct wording.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/open-letter-christian-nobility-ch1-three-walls>

Abuses to Be Discussed in Councils

Martin Luther

Lutheran · Reformation · Treatise

STROMATA 208

INTRODUCTION

In this second section of his 1520 broadside to the German princes, Luther sets aside doctrine for bookkeeping. Annates, "papal months," commends, incompatibilia, the datary's fee schedule for every kind of dispensation - each mechanism by which Rome drew revenue from German benefices is named, priced, and traced through its workings. The register is closer to an auditor's outrage than a theologian's argument: figures are cited, loopholes exposed one by one, building toward a portrait of a curia run as a revenue machine rather than a church. Written to move princes with the power to act rather than to persuade Rome, it reads as pointed, often sardonic prose - a useful counterweight to Luther's more doctrinal writings.

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

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

However that may be, this splendor of his is an offense, and the pope is bound on his soul's salvation to lay it aside, because St. Paul says, I Thess. 5:21: "Abstain from all outward shows, which give offense," and in Romans 12:17, "We should provide good, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men." An ordinary bishop's crown would be enough for the pope; he should be greater than others

in wisdom and holiness, and leave the crown of pride to Antichrist, as did his predecessors several centuries ago. They say he is a lord of the world; that is a lie; for Christ, Whose vicar and officer he boasts himself to be, said before Pilate, John 17:36, "My kingdom is not of this world," and no vicar's rule can go beyond his lord's. Moreover he is not the vicar of the glorified, but of the crucified Christ, as Paul says, I Cor 2:2, "I was willing to know nothing among you save Christ, and Him only as the Crucified"; and in Philippians 2:5, "So think of yourselves as ye see in Christ, Who emptied Himself and took upon Him the appearance of a servant"; and again in I Corinthians 1:23, "We preach Christ, the Crucified." Now they make the pope a vicar of the glorified Christ in heaven, and some of them have allowed the devil to rule them so completely that they have maintained that the pope is above the angels in heaven and has authority over them. These are indeed the very works of the very Antichrist.

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

Now that Italy is sucked dry, they come into Germany, and begin oh, so gently. But let us beware, or Germany will soon become like Italy. Already we have some cardinals; what the Romans seek by that the "drunken Germans" are not to understand until we have not a bishopric, a monastery, a living, a benefice, a heller or a pfennig left. Antichrist must take the treasures of the earth, as it was prophesied. So it goes on. They skim the cream off the bishoprics, monasteries and benefices, and because they do not yet venture to turn them all to shameful use, as they have done in Italy, they only practice for the present the sacred trickery of coupling together ten or twenty prelacies and taking a yearly portion from each of them, so as to make a tidy sum after all. The priory of Wurzburg yields a thousand gulden; that of Bamberg something; Mainz, Trier and the others, something more; and so from one to ten thousand gulden might be got together, in order that a cardinal might live at Rome like a rich king. "After they are used to this, we will create thirty or forty cardinals in a day, and give to one Mount St. Michael at Bamberg and the bishopric of Wurzburg to boot, hang on to these a few rich livings, until churches and cities are waste, and after that we will say, 'We are Christ's vicars and shepherds of Christ's sheep; the mad, drunken Germans must put up with it.'"

I advise, however, that the number of the cardinals be reduced, or that the pope be made to keep them at his own expense. Twelve of them would be more than enough, and each of them might have an income of a thousand gulden a year. How comes it that we Germans must put up with such robbery and such extortion of our property, at the hands of the pope? If the Kingdom of France has prevented it, why do we Germans let them make such fools and apes of us? It would all be more bearable if in this way they only stole our property; but they lay waste the churches and rob Christ's sheep of their pious shepherds, and destroy the worship and the Word of God. Even if there were not a single cardinal, the Church

would not go under. As it is they do nothing for the good of Christendom; they only wrangle about the incomes of bishoprics and prelacies, and that any robber could do.

If ninety-nine parts of the papal court were done away and only the hundredth part allowed to remain, it would still be large enough to give decisions in matters of faith. Now, however, there is such a swarm of vermin yonder in Rome, all boasting that they are "papal," that there was nothing like it in Babylon. There are more than three thousand papal secretaries alone; who will count the other offices, when they are so many that they scarcely can be counted? And they all lie in wait for the prebends and benefices of Germany as wolves lie in wait for the sheep. I believe that Germany now gives much more to the sheep. I believe that Germany now gives much more to the pope at Rome than it gave in former times to the emperors. Indeed, some estimate that every year more than three hundred thousand gulden find their way from Germany to Rome, quite uselessly and fruitlessly; we get nothing for it but scorn and contempt. And yet we wonder that princes, nobles, cities, endowments, land and people are impoverished! We should rather wonder that we still have anything to eat! Since we here come to the heart of the matter, we will pause a little, and let it be seen that the Germans are not quite such gross fools as not to note or understand the sharp practices of the Romans. I do not now complain that at Rome God's command and Christian law are despised; for such is the state of Christendom, and particularly of Rome, that we may not now complain of such high matters. Nor do I complain that natural or temporal law and reason count for nothing. The case is worse even than that. I complain that they do not keep their own self-devised canon law, though it is, to be sure, mere tyranny, avarice and temporal splendor, rather than law. Let us see!

In former times German emperors and princes permitted the pope to receive the annates from all the benefices of the German nation, i.e., the half of the first year's revenues from each benefice. This permission was given, however, in order that by means of these large sums of money, the pope might accumulate a treasure for fighting against the Turks and infidels in defense of Christendom, so that the burden of the war might not rest too heavily upon the nobility, but that the clergy also should contribute something toward it. This single-hearted devotion of the German nation the popes have so used, that they have received this money for more than a hundred years, have now made of it a binding tax and tribute, and have not only accumulated no treasure, but have used the money to endow many orders and offices at Rome, and to provide these offices with salaries, as though the annates were a fixed rent. When they pretend that they are about to fight against the Turks, they send out emissaries to gather money. Oft-times they issue an indulgence on this same pretext of fighting the Turks, for they think the mad Germans are forever to remain utter and arrant fools, give them money without end, and satisfy their unspeakable greed; though we clearly see that not a heller of the annates or of the indulgence-money or of all the rest, is used against the Turks, but all of it goes into the bottomless bag. They lie and deceive, make laws and make agreements with us, and they do not intend to keep any of them. All this must be counted the work of Christ and St. Peter! Now, in this matter the German nation, bishops and princes, should consider that they too are Christians, and should protect the people, whom they are set to rule and guard in things temporal and spiritual, against these ravening wolves who, in sheep's clothing, pretend to be shepherds and rulers; and, since the annates are so shamefully abused and the stipulated conditions are not fulfilled, they should not permit their land and people to be so sadly robbed and

ruined, against all justice; but by a law of the emperor or of the whole nation, they should either keep the annates at home or else abolish them again. For since the Romans do not keep the terms of the agreement, they have no right to the annates. Therefore the bishops and princes are bound to punish or prevent; such thievery and robbery, as the law requires.

In this they should aid the pope and support him, for he is perchance too weak to prevent such an abuse all by himself; or if he were to undertake to defend and maintain this practice, they ought resist him and fight against him as against a wolf and a tyrant, for he has no authority to do or to defend evil. Moreover, if it were ever desired to accumulate such a treasure against the Turks, we ought in the future to have sense enough to see that the German nation would be a better custodian for it than the pope; for the German nation has people enough for the fighting, if only the money is forthcoming. It is with the annates as it has been with many another Roman pretence. Again, the year has been so divided between the pope and the ruling bishops and canons, that the pope has six months in the year -- every other month -- in which to bestow the benefices which fall vacant in his months. In this way almost all the benefices are absorbed by Rome, especially the very best livings and dignities, and when once they fall into the hands of Rome, they never come out of them again, though a vacancy may never again occur in the pope's month. Thus the canons are cheated. This is a genuine robbery, which intends to let nothing escape.

Therefore it is high time that the "papal months" be altogether abolished, and that everything which they have brought to Rome be taken back again. For the princes and nobles should take measures that the stolen goods be returned, the thieves punished, and those who have abused privilege be deprived of privilege. If it is binding and valid when the pope on the day after his election makes, in his chancery, rules and laws whereby our foundations and livings are robbed, -- a thing which he has no right to do; then it should be still more valid if the Emperor Charles on the day after his coronation were to make rules and laws that not another benefice or living in all Germany shall be allowed to come into the hands of Rome by means of the "papal months," and that the livings which have already fallen into its hands shall be released, and redeemed from the Roman robbers; for he has this right by virtue of his office and his sword.

But now the Roman See of Avarice and Robbery has not been able to await the time when all the benefices, one after another, would, by the "papal months," come into its power, but hastens, with insatiable appetite, to get possession of them all as speedily as possible; and so besides the annates and the "months" it has hit upon a device by which benefices and livings fall to Rome in three ways: First, If any one who holds a free living dies at Rome or on the way to Rome, his living must forever belong to the Roman-I should rather say the robbing-See; and yet they will not be called robbers; though they are guilty of such robbery as no one has ever heard or read about. Second, In case any one who belongs to the household of the pope or of the cardinals holds or takes over a benefice, or in case one who already holds a benefice afterwards enters the "household" of the pope or of a cardinal; but who can count the "household" of the pope and of the cardinals, when the pope, if he only goes on a pleasure-ride, takes with him three or four thousand mule-riders, eclipsing all emperors and kings? Christ and St. Peter went on foot in order that their vicars might have the more pomp and splendor. Now avarice has cleverly thought out another scheme, and brings it to pass that even here many; have the name of "papal servant," just as though they were in Rome; all in order that in every place the mere rascally little word "papal servant" may bring all benefices to Rome and tie them fast there forever. Are not these vexatious and devilish inventions? Let us beware! Soon Mainz; Madgeburg and Halberstadt will gently pass into the hands of Rome, and the cardinalate will be paid for dearly enough. "Afterwards we will make all the

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

Since even these practices were not enough, and Avarice grew impatient at the long time it took to get hold of all the bishoprics, therefore my Lord Avarice devised the fiction that the bishoprics should be nominally abroad, but that their land and soil should be at Rome, and no bishop can be confirmed unless with a great sum of money he buy the pallium, and bind himself with terrible oaths to the pope's servant. This is the reason that no bishop ventures to act against the pope. That, too, is what the Romans were seeking when they imposed the oath, and thus the very richest bishoprics have fallen into debt and ruin. Mainz pays, as I hear, 20,000 gulden. These be your Romans! To be sure they decreed of old in the canon law that the pallium should be bestowed gratis, the number of papal servants diminished, the contest lessened, the chapters and bishops allowed their liberty. But this did not bring in money, and so they turned over a new leaf, and all authority was taken from the bishops and chapters; they are made ciphers, and have no office nor authority nor work, but everything is ruled by the archknives at Rome; soon they will have in hand even the office of sexton and bell-ringer in all the churches. All contests are brought to Rome, and by authority of the pope everyone does as he likes. What happened this very year? The Bishop of Strassburg wished to govern his chapter properly and to institute reforms in worship, and with this end in view made certain godly and Christian regulations. But my dear Lord Pope and the Holy Roman See, at the instigation of the priests, overthrew and altogether condemned this holy and spiritual ordinance. This is called "feeding the sheep of Christ!" Thus priests are to be encouraged against their own bishop, and their disobedience to divine law is to be protected! Antichrist himself, I hope, will not dare to put God to such open shame! There you have your pope after your own heart! Why did he do this? Ah! if one church were reformed, it would be a dangerous departure; Rome's turn too might come! Therefore it were better that no priest should be left at peace with another, that kings and princes should be set at odds, as has been the custom heretofore, and the world filled with the blood of Christians, only so the concord of Christians should not trouble the Holy Roman See with a reformation. So far we have been getting an idea of how they deal with livings which become vacant. But for tender-hearted Avarice the vacancies are too few, and so he brings his foresight to bear upon the benefices which are still occupied by their incumbents, so that they must be unfilled., even they are not unfilled. And this he does in many ways, as follows: First, He lies in wait for fat prebends or bishoprics which are held by an old or a sick man, or by one with an alleged disability. To such an incumbent, without his desire or consent, the Holy See gives a coadjutor's i.e., an "assistant," for the coadjutor's benefit, because he is "papal servant," or has paid for the position, or has earned it by some other ignoble service to Rome. In this case the rights of the chapter or the rights of him who has the bestowal of the living must be surrendered, and the whole thing fall into the hands of Rome. Second, There is a little word commend, by which the pope entrusts the keeping of a rich, fat monastery or church to a cardinal or to another oh his people, just as though I were to give you a hundred gulden to keep. This is not called the giving or bestowing of the monastery nor even its destruction, or the abolition of the worship of God, but only "giving it into keeping"; not that he to whom it is entrusted is to care for it, or build it up, but he is to drive out the incumbent, to receive the goods and revenues, and to install some apostate, renegade monk, who accepts five or six gulden a year and sits in the church all day selling pictures and images to the pilgrims, so that henceforth neither prayers nor masses are said there. If this were to be called destroying monasteries and abolishing the worship of God, then the pope would have to be called a destroyer of Christendom and an abolisher

of God's worship, because this is his constant practice. That would be a hard saying at Rome, and so we must call it a commend or a "command to take charge" of the monastery. The pope can every year make commends out of four or more of these monasteries, a single one of which may have an income of more than six thousand gulden. This is the way the Romans increase the worship of God and preserve the monasteries. The Germans also are beginning to find it out. Third, There are some benefices which they call incompatibilia, and which, according to the ordinances of the canon law, cannot be held by one man at the same time, as for instance, two parishes, two bishoprics and the like. In these cases the Holy Roman See of Avarice evades the canon law by making "glosses," called unio and incorporatio, i.e., by "incorporating" many incompatibilia, so that each becomes a part of every other and all of them together are looked upon as though they were one living. They are then no longer "incompatible," and the holy canon law is satisfied, in that it is no longer binding, except upon those who do not buy these "glosses" from the pope or his datarius. The unio, i.e., "uniting," is of the same nature. The pope binds many such benefices together like a bundle of sticks, and by virtue of this bond they are all regarded as one benefice. So there is at Rome one courtesan who holds, for himself alone, 22 parishes, 7 priories and 44 canonries besides, -- all by the help of that masterly "gloss," which holds that this is not illegal. What cardinals and other prelates have, everyone may imagine for himself. In this way the Germans are to have their purses eased and their itch cured. Another of the "glosses" is the administratio, i.e., a man may have beside his bishopric, an abbacy or a dignity, and possess all the property which goes with it, only he has no other title than that of "administrator." For at Rome it is sufficient that words are changed and not the things they stand for; as though I were to teach that a bawdy-house keeper should have the name of "burgomaster's wife," and yet continue to ply her trade. This kind of Roman rule St. Peter foretold when he said, in II Peter 2:3: "There shall come false teachers, who in covetousness, with feigned words, shall make merchandise of you, to get their gains." Again, dear Roman Avarice has invented the custom of selling and bestowing livings to such advantage that the seller or disposer retains reversionary rights, upon them; to wit, if the incumbent dies, the benefice freely reverts to him who previously sold, bestowed or surrendered it. In this way they have made livings hereditary property, so that henceforth no one can come into possession of them, except the man to whom the seller is willing to dispose of them, or to whom he bequeaths his rights at death. Besides, there are many who transfer to others the mere title to a benefice from which those who get the title derive not a heller of income. It is now an old custom, too, to give another man a benefice and to reserve a certain part out of the annual revenue. In olden times this was simony. Of these things there are so many more that they cannot all be counted. They treat livings more shamefully than the heathen beneath the cross treated the garments of Christ. Yet all that has hitherto been said is ancient history and an every-day occurrence at Rome. Avarice has devised one thing more, which may, I hope, be his last morsel, and choke him. The pope has a noble little device called pectoralis reservatio, i.e., his "mental reservation," and proprius motus, i.e., the "arbitrary will of his authority." It goes like this. When one man has gotten a benefice at Rome, and the appointment has been regularly signed and sealed, according to custom, and there comes another, who brings money, or has laid the pope under obligation in some other way, of which we will not speak, and desires of the pope the same benefice, then the pope takes it from the first man and gives it to the second. If it is said that this is unjust, then the Most Holy Father must make some excuse, that he may not be reproved for doing such open violence to the law, and says that in his mind

and heart he had reserved that benefice to himself and his own plenary disposal, although he had never before in his whole life either thought or heard of it. Thus he has now found a little "gloss" by which he can, in his own person, lie and deceive, and make a fool and an ape of anybody -- all this he does brazenly and openly, and yet he wishes to be the head of Christendom, though with his open lies he lets the Evil Spirit rule him. This arbitrary will and lying "reservation" of the pope creates in Rome a state of affairs which is unspeakable. There is buying, selling, bartering, trading, trafficking, lying, deceiving, robbing, stealing, luxury, harlotry, knavery, and every sort of contempt of God, and even the rule of Antichrist could not be more scandalous. Venice, Antwerp, Cairo are nothing compared to this fair which is held at Rome and the business which is done there, except that in those other places they still observe and reason. At Rome everything goes as the devil wills, and out of this ocean like virtue flows into all the world. Is it a wonder that such people fear a reformation and a free council, and prefer to set all kings and princes at enmity rather than have them unite and bring about a council? Who could bear to have such knavery exposed if it were his own? Finally, for all this noble commerce the pope has built a warehouse, namely, the house of the datarius, in Rome. Thither all must come who deal after this fashion in benefices and livings. From him they must buy their "glosses" and get the power to practice such archknavery. In former times Rome was generous, and then justice had either to be bought or else suppressed with money, but now she has become exorbitant, and no one dare be a knave unless with a great sum he has first bought the right. If that is not a brothel above all the brothels one can imagine, then I do not know what brothel means. If you have money in this house, then you can come by all the things I have said; and not only these, but all sort of usury are here made honest, for a consideration, and the possession of all property acquired by theft or robbery is legalized. Here vows are dissolved; here monks at granted liberty to leave their orders; here marriage is on sale to the clergy; here bastards can become legitimate; here all dishonor and shame can come to honor; all ill repute and stigma of evil are here knighted and ennobled here is permitted the marriage which is within the forbidden degrees or has some other defect. Oh! what a taxing and a robbing rules there! It looks as though all the laws of the Church were made for one purpose only -- to be nothing but so many money-snares, from which a man must extricate himself, if he would be a Christian. Yea, here the devil becomes a saint, and a god to boot. What heaven and earth cannot, that this house can do! They call them compositions! "Compositions" indeed! rather "confusions"! Oh, what a modest tax is the Rhine-toll, compared with the tribute taken by this holy house! Let no one accuse me of exaggeration! It is all so open that even at Rome they must confess the evil to be greater and more terrible than any one can say. I have not yet stirred up the hell-broth of personal vices, nor do I intend to do so. I speak of things which are common talk, and yet I have not words to tell them all. The bishops, the priests and, above all, the doctors in the universities, who draw their salaries for this purpose, should have done their duty and with common consent have written and cried out against these things; but they have done the very opposite. There remains one last word, and I must say that too. Since boundless Avarice has not been satisfied with all these treasures, which three great kings might well think sufficient, he now begins to transfer this trade and sell it to Fugger of Augsburg, so that the lending and trading and buying of bishoprics and benefices, and the driving of bargains in spiritual goods has now come to the right place, and spiritual and temporal goods have become one business. And now I would fain hear of a mind so lofty that it could imagine what this Roman Avarice might yet be able to do and has not already done; unless Fugger were to transfer or

sell this combination of two lines of business to somebody else. I believe we have reached the limit. As for what they have stolen in all lands and still steal and extort, by means of indulgences, bulls, letters of confession, "butter-letters" and other confessionalia, -- all this I consider mere patch-work, and like casting a single devil more into hell. Not that they bring in little, for a mighty king could well support himself on their returns, but they are not to be compared with the streams of treasure above mentioned. I shall also say nothing at present of how this indulgence money has been applied. Another time I shall inquire about that, for Campoflore, and Belvidere and certain other places probably know something about it. Since, then, such devilish rule is not only open robbery and deceit, and the tyranny of the gates of hell, but also ruins Christendom in body and soul, it is our duty to use all diligence in protecting Christendom against such misery and destruction. If we would fight the Turks, let us make a beginning here, where they are at their worst. If we justly hang thieves and behead robbers, why should we let Roman Avarice go free? For he is the greatest thief and robber that has come or can come into the world, and all in the holy Name of Christ and of St. Peter! Who can longer endure it or keep silence? Almost everything he owns has been gotten by theft and robbery; that is the truth, and all history shows it. The pope never got by purchase such great properties that from his office alone he can raise about a million ducats, not to mention the mines of treasure named above and the income of his lands. Nor did it come to him by inheritance from Christ or from St. Peter; no one ever loaned it or gave it to him; it has not become his by virtue of immemorial use and enjoyment. Tell me, then, whence he can have it? Learn from this what they have in mind when they send out legates to collect money for use against the Turks.

Source: Translated by C. M. Jacobs, in *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915).

Previously prepared for an earlier version of *The Stromata*. Accessed July 2026.

Translation: Author died 1546. Jacobs' 1915 Philadelphia Edition translation, confirmed public domain via publication date and verbatim phrase match against Project Wittenberg. Not the copyrighted *Luther's Works American Edition* (Fortress Press) - confirmed distinct wording.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/open-letter-christian-nobility-ch2-abuses>

Proposals for Reform

Martin Luther

Lutheran · Reformation · Treatise

STROMATA 209

INTRODUCTION

In this third and final chapter of Luther's 1520 manifesto, the reformer sets aside argument for enumeration: twenty-seven concrete proposals for remaking the German church and civic life, from abolishing papal fees and reserved benefices to permitting clerical marriage and overhauling university curricula. The register shifts continually - sober legal reasoning gives way to blistering sarcasm about kissed feet and golden litters, then to a weary plea for reconciliation with the Bohemians. Read together, the list reveals less a systematic program than the improvisations of a man convinced reform cannot wait for consensus. Its numbering invites browsing as readily as continuous reading.

Part One

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

- Every prince, nobleman and city should boldly forbid their subjects to pay the annates to Rome and should abolish them entirely; for the pope has broken the compact and made the annates a robbery, to the injury and shame of the whole German nation. He gives them to his friends, sells them for large amounts of money, and uses them to endow offices. He has thus lost his right to them, and deserves punishment. It is therefore the duty of the temporal authorities to protect the innocent and prevent injustice, as Paul teaches in Romans 13:4, and St. Peter in I Peter 2:14, and even the canon law in Case 16, Question 7 de filiis. Thus it has come about that men are saying to the pope and his followers, *T u o r a*, "Thou shalt pray"; to the emperor and his followers, *Tu protege*, "Thou shalt guard"; to the common man, *Tu labora*, "Thou shalt work." Not, however, as though everyone were not to pray, guard and work; for the man who is diligent in his calling is praying, guarding and working in all that he does, but everyone should have his own especial task.
- Since the pope with his Roman practices -- his commends, adjutories; reservations, *gratiae expectativae*, papal months, incorporations, unions, *pallia*, rules in chancery, and such like knavery -- usurps all the German foundations without authority and right, and gives and sells them to foreigners at Rome, who do nothing in German lands to earn them; and since he thereby robs the ordinaries of their rights, makes the bishops mere ciphers and figure-heads, and acts against his

own canon law, against nature and against reason, until it has finally gone so far that out of sheer avarice the livings and benefices are sold to gross, ignorant asses and knaves at Rome, while pious and learned folk have no profit of their wisdom and merit, so that the poor people of the German nation have to go without good and learned prelates and thus go to ruin.

Therefore, the Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom, and should do this for the salvation of the poor souls who must go to ruin through his tyranny. They should. ordain, order, and decree, that henceforth no benefice shall be drawn into the hands of Rome, and that hereafter no appointment shall be obtained there in any manner whatsoever, but that the benefices shall be brought out and kept out from under this tyrannical authority; and they should restore to the ordinaries the right and office of ordering these benefices in the German nation as best they may. And if a "courtesan" were to come from Rome, he should receive a strict command either to keep his distance, or else to jump into the Rhine or the nearest river, and take the Roman ban, with its seals and letters, to a cold bath. They would then take note at Rome that the Germans are not always mad and drunken, but that they have really become Christians, and intend to permit no longer the mockery and scorn of the holy name of Christ, under which all this knavery and destruction of souls goes on, but have more regard to God and His glory than to the authority of men.

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

If he has this power then we should depose all bishops, archbishops and primates and make them mere parish-priests, so that the pope alone may be over them, as he now is. He leaves to bishops, archbishops and primates no regular authority or office, usurps everything for himself, and lets them keep only the name and empty title. It has gone so far that by his "exemptions" the monasteries, the abbots and the prelates are withdrawn from the regular authority of the bishops, so that there is no longer any order in Christendom. From this must follow what has followed -- relaxation of discipline and license to do evil everywhere -- so that I verily fear the pope can be called the "man of sin." There is in Christendom no discipline, no rule, no order; and who is to blame except the pope? This usurped authority of his he applies strictly to all the prelates, and takes away their rods; and he is generous to all subjects, giving them or selling them their liberty.

Nevertheless, for fear he may complain that he is robbed of his authority, it should be decreed that when the primates or archbishops are unable to settle a case, or when a controversy arises among themselves, such a case must be laid before the pope, but not every little matter. Thus it was done in olden times, and thus the famous Council of Nicaea decreed. If a case can be settled without the pope, then his Holiness should not be troubled with such minor matters, but give himself to that prayer, meditation and care for all Christendom, of which he boasts. This is what the Apostles did. They said, Acts 6:2, "It is not meet that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables, but we will keep to preaching and prayer and set others over the work." But now Rome stands for nothing else than the despising of the Gospel and

of prayer, and for the serving of "tables," i.e., of temporal affairs, and the rule of the Apostles and of the pope agree as Christ agrees with Lucifer, heaven with hell, night with day; yet he is called "Vicar of Christ and Successor of the Apostles."

- It should be decreed that no temporal matter shall be taken to Rome, but that all such cases shall be left to the temporal authorities, as the Romans themselves decree in that canon law of theirs, which they do not keep. For it from the should be the duty of the pope, as the man most learned in the Scriptures and most Holy, not in name only, but in truth, to administer affairs which concern the faith and holy life of Christians, to hold the primates and arch-bishops to these things, and to help them in dealing with and caring for these matters. So St. Paul teaches in Corinthians 6:7, and takes the Corinthians severely to task for their concern with worldly things. For it works intolerable injury to all lands that such cases are tried at Rome. It increases the costs, and moreover the judges do not know the manners, laws and customs of the various countries, so that they often do violence to the facts and base their decisions on their own laws and opinions, and thus injustice is inevitably done the contestants.

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

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

- No more reservations should be valid, and no more benefices should be seized by Rome, even if the incumbent dies, or there is a contest, or the incumbent is a "servant" of a cardinal or of the pope; and it should be strictly forbidden and prevented that any "courtesan" should institute a contest over any benefice, so as to cite pious priests to Rome, harass them and drive them into lawsuits. If, in consequence of this prohibition, there should come from Rome a ban or an ecclesiastical censure, it should be disregarded, just as though a thief were to lay a man under the

ban because he would not let him steal. Indeed they should be severely punished because they so blasphemously misuse the ban and the name of God to support their robbery, and with falsely devised threats would drive us to endure and to praise such blasphemy of God's name and such abuse of Christian authority, and thus to become, in the sight of God, partakers in their rascality; it is our duty before God to resist it, for St. Paul, in Romans 1:32, reproves as guilty of death not only "those who do such things," but also those who consent to such things and allow them to be done. Most unbearable of all is the lying *reservatio pectoralis*, whereby Christendom is so scandalously and openly put to shame and scorn, because its head deals in open lies, and out of love for the accursed money, shamelessly deceives and fools everybody.

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

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

- The Roman See should also do away with the *officia*, and diminish the swarm of vermin at Rome, so that the pope's household can be supported by the pope's own purse. The pope should not allow his court to surpass in pomp and extravagance the courts of all kings, seeing that such a condition not only has never been serviceable to the cause of Christian faith, but the courtiers have been kept thereby from study and prayer, until they are scarce able to speak about the faith at all. This they proved quite plainly at the last Roman Council, in which, amongst many other childish and frivolous things, they decreed that the soul of man is immortal and that every priest must say his prayers once a month on pain of losing his benefice. How shall matters which concern faith and the Church be decided by people so hardened and blinded by great avarice, wealth and worldly splendor, that they have only now decreed that the soul is immortal? It is no small shame to all Christians that at Rome they deal so disgracefully with the faith. If they had less wealth and pomp, they could pray and study better, and so become worthy and able to deal with matters of faith, as was the case in olden times when they were bishops, and did not presume to be kings over all kings.
- The hard and terrible oaths should be abolished, which the bishops are wrongfully compelled to render to the pope, and by which they are bound like servants, as that worthless and unlearned chapter, *Significasti*, arbitrarily and most stupidly decrees. It is not enough that they burden us in

body, soul and property with their many mad laws, by which faith is weakened and Christendom ruined; but they seize upon the person and office and work of the bishops, and now upon the investiture also, which was in olden times the right of the German emperors, and in France and other kingdoms still belongs to the kings.

On this point they had great wars and disputes with the emperors, until at last, with impudent authority, they took the right and have kept it until now; just as though the Germans, above all the Christians on earth, had to be the puppets of the pope and the Roman See and do and suffer what no one else will do and suffer. Since, then, this is sheer violence and robbery, hindering the regular authority of the bishops and injuring poor souls, therefore the emperor and

- The pope should have no authority over the emperor, except that he anoints and crowns him at the altar, just as a bishop anoints and crowns a king; and we should not henceforth yield to that devilish pride which compels the emperor to kiss the pope's feet or sit at his feet, or, as they claim, hold his stirrup or the bridle of his mule when he mounts for a ride; still less should he do homage and swear faithful allegiance to the pope, as the popes have shamelessly ventured to demand as if they possessed that right. The chapter "Solite," in which the papal authority is raised above the imperial authority, is not worth a heller, nor are any of those who rest upon it or fear it; for it does nothing else than force the holy words of God out of their true meaning, and wrest them to human dreams, as I have showed in a Latin treatise.

Such extravagant, over-presumptuous, and more than wicked doings of the pope have been devised by the devil, in order that under their cover he may in time bring in Antichrist, and raise the pope above God, as many are ready doing and have done. It is not proper for the pope to exalt himself above the temporal authorities, save only in spiritual offices such as preaching and absolving. In other things he is to be subject, as Paul and Peter teach, in Romans 13:1, and 1 Peter 2:13, and as I have said above. His nobles are in duty bound to prevent and punish such tyranny. He is not vicar of Christ in heaven, but of Christ as He walked on earth. For Christ in heaven, in the form of a ruler, needs no vicar, but He sits and sees, does, and knows all things, and has all power. But He needs a vicar in the form of a servant, in which He walked on earth, toiling, preaching, suffering and dying. Now they turn it around, take from Christ the heavenly form of ruler and give it to the pope, leaving the form of a servant to perish utterly. He might almost be the "Counter-Christ" whom the Scriptures call Antichrist, for all his nature, work and doings are against Christ, for the destruction of Christ's nature and work.

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

Of the same sort is also that unheard-of lie about the "Donation of Constantine." It must have been some special plague of God that so many people of understanding have let themselves be talked into accepting such likes as these, which are so manifest and clumsy that I should think any drunken peasant could lie more adroitly and skillfully. How can a man rule an empire and at the same time continue to

preach, pray, study and care for the poor? Yet these are the duties which properly and peculiarly belong to the pope, and they were imposed by Christ (Matthew 10:10) in such earnest that He even forbade His disciples to take with them cloak or money, since these duties can scarcely be performed by one who has to rule even a single household. Yet the pope would rule an empire and continue to be pope! This is a device of the knaves who would like, under the pope's name, to be lords of the world, and by means of the pope and the name of Christ, to restore the Roman Empire to its former state.

- The pope should restrain himself, take his fingers out of the pie, and claim no title to the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily. He has exactly as much right to that kingdom as I have, and yet he wishes to be its overlord. It is plunder got by violence, like almost all his other possessions. The emperor, therefore, should not grant him this fief, and if it has been granted, he should no longer give his consent to it, and should point him instead to the Bible and the prayer-books, so that he may preach and pray, and leave to temporal lords the ruling of lands and peoples, especially when no one has given them to him.

The same opinion should hold as regards Bologna, Imola, Vicenza, Ravenna and all the territories in the Mark of Ancona, in Romagna, and in other Italian lands, which the pope has taken by force and possesses without right. Moreover, he has meddled in these things against all the commands of Christ and of St. Paul. For thus saith St. Paul, 2 Timothy 2:3, "No one entangleth himself with worldly affairs, whose business it is to wait upon the divine knighthood". Now the pope should be the head and front of this knighthood, yet he meddles in worldly affairs more than any emperor or king. Why then he must be helped out of them and allowed to attend to his knighthood. Christ also, Whose vicar he boasts himself to be, was never willing to have aught to do with temporal rule; indeed, to one who asked of him a decision respecting his brother, He said, Luke 12:14, "Who made Me a judge over you?" But the pope rushes in unbidden, and boldly takes hold of everything as though he were a god, until he no longer knows what Christ is, Whose vicar he pretends to be.

- The kissing of the pope's feet should take place no more. It is an unchristian, nay, 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 not the pope do the same to others in honor of their holiness? Compare the two -- Christ and the pope! John 13:1 ff., Christ washed His disciples' feet and dried them, and the disciples never washed His feet; the pope, as though he were higher than Christ, turns things around and, as a great favor, allows people to kiss his feet, though he ought properly to use all his power to prevent it, if anyone wished to do it; like Paul and Barnabas, who would not let the people of Lystra pay them divine honor, but said, Acts 14:11-16, "We are men like you." But our sycophants have gone so far as to make for us an idol, and now no one fears God so much as he fears the pope, no one pays Him such ceremonious honor. That they can endure! What they cannot endure is that a hair's-breadth should be taken away from the proud estate of the pope. Now if they were Christians, and held God's honor above their own, the pope would never be happy while he knew that God's honor was despised and his own exalted, and he would let no man pay him honor until he saw that God's honor was again exalted and was greater than his own. It is another piece of the same scandalous pride, that the pope is not satisfied to ride or to be driven in a vehicle, but although he is strong and in good health, he has himself

borne by men, with unheard-of splendor, like an idol. How, pray, does such satanic pride agree with the example of Christ, Who went on foot, as did all His disciples? Where has there ever been a worldly monarch who went about in such worldly glory as he who wishes to be the head of all those who are to despise and flee worldly glory, i.e., of Christians? Not that this in itself should give us very much concern, but we should rightly fear the wrath of God, if we flatter this kind of pride and do not show our indignation. It is enough that the pope should rant and play the fool in this wise; but that we should approve it and tolerate it, -- this too much.

For what Christian heart can or ought to take pleasure in seeing that when the pope wishes to receive the communion, he sits quiet, like a gracious lord, and has the sacrament passed to him on a golden rod by a bowing cardinal on bended knee? As though the holy sacrament were no worthy that a pope, a poor stinking sinner, should rise to show God honor, when all other Christians, who are much more holy than the Most Holy Father, the pope, receive it with all reverence! Would it be a wonder if God were to send a plague upon us all because we suffer such dishonor to be done Him by our prelates, and approve it, and by our silence or our flattery make ourselves partakers of such damnable pride?

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

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

Even if this reason did not exist, there is still another and a better: to wit, that by these pilgrimages men are led away into a false conceit and a misunderstanding of the divine commandments; for they think that this going on pilgrimage is a precious, good work, and this is not true. It is a very small good work, oftentimes an evil, delusive work, for God has not commanded it. But He has commanded that a man shall care for his wife and children, and look after such other duties as belong to the married state, and besides this, to serve and help his neighbor. Now it comes to pass that a man makes a pilgrimage to Rome when no one has commanded him to do so, spends fifty or a hundred gulden, more or less, and leaves his wife and child, or at least his neighbor, at home to suffer want. Yet the foolish fellow thinks to gloss over such disobedience and contempt of the divine commandments with his self-willed pilgriming, when it is really only curiosity or devilish delusion which leads him to it. The popes have helped this along with their false, feigned, foolish, "golden years," by which the people are excited, stirred up, torn away from God's commandments, and drawn toward their own deluded undertakings. Thus they have accomplished the very thing they should have forbidden; but it has brought in money and strengthened false authority, therefore it has had to continue, though it is against God and the salvation of souls.

In order to destroy in simple Christians this false, seductive faith, and to restore a true understanding of good works, all pilgrimages should be given up; for there is in them nothing good -- no command-

ment, no obedience -- but, on the contrary, numberless occasions for sin and for the despising of God's commandments. Hence come the many beggars, who by this pilgriming carry on endless knaveries and learn the habit of begging when they are not in want. Hence, too, come vagabondage, and many other ills which I shall not now recount. If any one, now, wishes to go on pilgrimage or take a pilgrim's vow, he should first show his reasons to his parish-priest or to his lord. If it turns out that he wishes to do it for the sake of the good work, the priest or lord should boldly tread the vow and good work under foot, as though it were a lure of the devil, and show him how to apply the money and labor necessary for the pilgrimage to the keeping of God's commandments and to works a thousandfold better, viz., by spending it on his own family or on his poor neighbors. But if he wishes to make the pilgrimage out of curiosity, to see new lands and cities, he may be allowed to do as he likes. If, however, he has made the vow while ill, then such vows ought to be forbidden and canceled, and the commandments of God exalted, and he ought to be shown that he should henceforth be satisfied with the vow he made in baptism, to keep the commandments of God. And yet, in order to quiet his conscience, he may be allowed this once to perform his foolish vow. No one wants to walk in the straight and common path of God's commandments; everyone makes himself new roads and new vows, as though he had fulfilled all the commandments of God.

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

The mendicants should also be relieved of preaching and hearing confession, except when they are called to this work by the express desire of bishops, parishes, congregations or the temporal authorities. Out of their preaching and shriving there has come nothing but hatred and envy between priests and monks, and great offense and hindrance to the common people. For this reason it should properly and deservedly cease, because it can well be dispensed with. It looks suspiciously as though it were not for nothing that the Holy Roman See has increased this army, so that the priests and bishops, tired of its tyranny, might not some time become too strong for it and begin a reformation which would not be to the liking of his Holiness.

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

The pope must also be forbidden to found and confirm any more of these orders; nay, he must be commanded to abolish some of them and reduce their number, since the faith of Christ, which is alone the highest good and which exists without any orders, is in no small danger, because these many different works and forms easily mislead men into living for them instead of giving heed to the faith. Unless there are in the monasteries wise prelates, who preach and who concern themselves with faith more than with the rules of the orders, the order cannot but harm and delude simple souls who think only of works.

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

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

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

- We also see how the priesthood has fallen, and how many a poor priest is overburdened with wife and child, and his conscience troubled, yet no one does anything to help him though he might easily be helped. Though pope and bishops may let things go as they go, and let them go to ruin

if they will, I will save my conscience and open my mouth freely, whether it vex pope, bishops or any one else.

Wherefore I say that according to the institution of Christ and the Apostles every city should have a priest or bishop, as St. Paul clearly says in Titus 1:6; and this priest should not be compelled to live without a wedded wife, but should be permitted to have one, as St. Paul says in I Timothy 3:2, and Titus 1:6, "A bishop should be a man who is blameless, and the husband of but one wedded wife, whose children are obedient and virtuous," etc. For with St. Paul a bishop and a priest are one and the same thing, as witness also St. Jerome. But of bishops as they now are; the Scriptures know nothing; they have been appointed by the ordinance of the Christian Church, that one of them may rule over many priests.

So then we clearly learn from the Apostle that it should be the custom for every town to choose out of the congregation a learned and pious citizen, entrust to him the office of the ministry, and support him at the expense of the community, leaving him free choice to marry or not. He should have with him several priests or deacons, who might also be married or not, as they chose, to help him rule the people of the community by means of preaching and the sacraments, as is still the practice in the Greek Church. At a later time, when there were so many persecutions and controversies with heretics, there were many holy fathers who of their own accord abstained from matrimony, to the end that they might the better devote themselves to study and be prepared at any time for death or for controversy. Then the Roman See interfered, out of sheer wantonness, and made a universal commandment forbidding priests to marry. This was done at the bidding of the devil, as St. Paul declares in I Timothy 4, "There shall come teachers who bring doctrines of devils, and forbid to marry." From this has arisen so much untold misery, occasion was given for the withdrawal of the Greek Church, and division, sin, shame and scandal were increased without end, - which is the result of everything the devil does.

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

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

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

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

On the question whether those who are not yet married should marry or remain unmarried, I do not care to give advice either way. I leave that to common Christian order and to everyone's better judgment.

But as regards the wretched multitude who now sit in shame and heaviness of conscience because their wives are called "priests' harlots" and their children "priests' children" I will not withhold my faithful counsel nor deprive them of the comfort which is their due, I say this boldly by my jester's right.

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

First, not every priest can do without a woman, not only on account of the weakness of the flesh, but much more because of the necessities of the household. If he, then, may have a woman, and the pope grants him that, and yet may not have her in marriage, -- what is that but leaving a man and a woman alone and forbidding them to fall? It is as though one were to put fire and straw together and command that it shall neither smoke nor burn. Second, The pope has as little power to command this, as he has to forbid eating, drinking, the natural movement of the bowels or growing fat. No one, therefore, is bound to keep it, but the pope is responsible for all the sins which are committed against this ordinance, for all the souls which are lost thereby, for all the consciences which are thereby confused and tortured; and therefore he has long deserved that some one should drive him out of the world, so many wretched souls has he strangled with this devil's snare; though I hope that there are many to whom God has been more gracious at their last hour than the pope has been in their life. Nothing good has ever come out of the papacy and its laws, nor ever will. Third, Although the law of the pope is against it, nevertheless, when the estate of matrimony has been entered against the pope's law, then his law is at an end, and is no longer valid; for the commandment of God, which decrees that no one shall put man and wife asunder, takes precedence of the law of the pope; and the commandments of God must not be broken and neglected for the sake of the pope's commandment, though many mad jurists, in the papal interest, have devised "impediments" and have prevented, destroyed and confused the estate of matrimony, until by their means God's commandment has been altogether destroyed. To make a long story short, there are not in the whole "spiritual" law of the pope two lines which could be instructive to a pious Christian, and there are, alas! So many mistaken and dangerous laws that the best thing would be to make a bonfire of it.

But if you say that this would give offense, and the pope must first grant dispensation, I reply that whatever offense is in it, is the fault of the Roman See, which has established such laws without right

and against God; before God and the Scriptures it is no offense. Moreover, if the pope can grant dispensations from his avaricious and tyrannical laws for money's sake, then every Christian can grant dispensations from them -- for the sake of God and the salvation of souls. For Christ has set us free from all human laws, especially when they are opposed to God and the salvation of souls, as St. Paul teaches in Galatians 5:1 and 1 Corinthians 9:4 ff.; 10:23.

Part Two

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

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

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

- It were also necessary to abolish all anniversary mortuary and "soul" masses, or at least to diminish their number, since we plainly see that they have become nothing but a mockery, by which God is deeply angered, and that their only purpose is money-getting, gorging and drunkenness. What kind of pleasure should God have in such a miserable gabbing or wretched vigils and masses, which is neither reading nor praying, and even when prayed, they are performed not for God's sake and out of willing love, but for money's sake and because they are a bounden duty. Now it is not possible that any work not done out of willing love can please God or obtain anything from Him. And so it is altogether Christian to abolish, or at least diminish, everything which we see growing into an abuse, and which angers rather than reconciles God. It would please me more -- nay, it would be more acceptable to God and far better -- that a foundation, church or monastery should put all its anniversary masses and vigils together, and on one day, with hearty sincerity, devotion and faith, hold a true vigil and mass for all its benefactors, rather than hold them by the thousand every year, for each benefactor a special mass, without this devotion and faith. O dear Christians! God cares not for much praying, but for true praying! Nay, He condemns the many and long prayers, and says in Matthew 6:7; 23:14, they will only earn more punishment thereby. But avarice, which cannot trust God, brings such things to pass, fearing that otherwise it must die of hunger!
- Certain of the penalties or punishments of the canon law should also be abolished, especially the interdict, which is, beyond all doubt, an invention of the evil Spirit. It is not a devil's work to try to atone for one sin with many greater sins? And yet, to put God's Word and worship to silence, or to do away with them, is a greater sin than strangling twenty popes at once, and far greater than killing a priest or keeping back some Church property. This is another of the tender virtues taught in the "spiritual law." For one of the reasons why this law is called "spiritual" is because it comes from the Spirit; not, however, from the Holy Spirit, but from the evil spirit.

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

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

- All festivals should be abolished, and Sunday alone retained. If it were desired, however, to retain the festivals of Our Lady and of the greater saints, they should be transferred to Sunday,

or observed only by a morning mass, after which all the rest of the day should be a working-day. The reason is this: The feast-days are now abused by drinking, gaming, idleness and all manner of sins, so that on the holy days we anger God more than on other days, and have altogether turned things around; the hold days are not holy and the working days are holy, and not only is no service done to God and His saints by the many holy days, but rather great dishonor. There are, indeed, some mad prelates who think they are doing a good work if they make a festival in honor of St. Ottilia or St. Barbara or some other saint, according to the promptings of their blind devotion; but they would be doing a far better work if they honored the saint by turning a saint's-day into a working day.

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

Above all, we ought utterly to abolish the consecration days, since they have become nothing else than taverns, fairs and gaming places, and serve only to the increase of God's dishonor and to the damnation of souls. All the pretence about the custom having had a good beginning and being a good work is of no avail. Did not God Himself set aside His own law, which He had given from heaven, when it was perverted and abused? And does He not still daily overturn what He has appointed and destroy what He has made, because of such perversion and abuse? As it is written of Him in Psalm 18:27, "With the perverted Thou wilt show Thyself perverse."

- The grades or degrees within which marriage is forbidden should be changed, as, for instance, the sponsorships and the third and fourth degrees and if the pope can grant dispensation in these matters for money and for the sake of the shameful traffic, then every parish priest may give the same dispensations gratis and for the salvation of souls. Yea, would to God that all the things which we must buy at Rome to free ourselves from that money-snare, the canon law, -- such things as indulgences, letters or indulgence, "butter-letters," "mass-letters," and all the rest of the confessionalia and knaveries for the sale at Rome, with which the poor folk are deceived and robbed of their money; would to God, I say, that any priest could, without payment, do and omit all these things! For if the pope has the authority to sell his snares for money and his spiritual nets (I should say laws), surely any priest has much more authority to rend his nets and for God's sake to tread them under foot. But if he has not this right, neither has the pope the right to sell them at his shameful fair.

This is the place to say too that the fasts should be matters of liberty, and all sorts of food made free, as the Gospel makes them. (Matthew 15:11) For at Rome they themselves laugh at the fasts, making us foreigners eat the oil with which they would not grease their shoes, and afterwards selling us liberty to eat butter and all sorts of other things; yet the holy Apostle says that in all these things we already

have liberty through the Gospel. (1 Cor. 10:25 ff.) But they have caught us with their canon law and stolen our rights from us, so that we may have to buy them back with money. Thus they have made our consciences so timid and shy that it is no longer easy to preach about this liberty because the common people take such great offense, thinking it is a greater sin to eat butter than to lie, to swear, or even to live unchastely. Nevertheless, what men have decreed, that is the work of man; put it where you will, nothing good ever comes out of it.

- The forest chapels and rustic churches must be utterly destroyed, -- those, namely, to which the recent pilgrimages have been directed, -- Wilsnack, Sternberg, Trier, the Grimmenthal, and now Regensburg and a goodly number of others. Oh, what a terrible and heavy account will the bishops have to render, who permit this devilish deceit and receive its profits. They should be the first to forbid it, and yet they think it a divine and holy thing, and do not see that it is the devil's doing, to strengthen avarice, to create a false, feigned faith, to weaken the parish churches, to multiply taverns and harlotry, to waste money and labor, and to lead the poor folk by the nose. If they had only read the Scriptures to as good purpose as they have read their damnable canon law, they would know well how to deal with this matter.

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

But what shall I say? Every one plans only how he may establish and maintain such a place of pilgrimage in his diocese and is not at all concerned to have the people believe and live aright; the rulers are like the people; one blind man leads another. (Matthew 13:14) Nay, where pilgrimages are not successful, they begin to canonize saints, not in honor of the saints -- for they are sufficiently honored without canonization -- but in order to draw crowds and bring in money. Pope and bishop help along; it rains indulgences; there is always money enough for that. But for what God has commanded no one provides; no one runs after these things; there is no money for them. Alas, that we should be so blind! We not only give the devil his own way in his tricks, but we even strengthen him in his wantonness and increase his pranks. I would that the dear saints were left in peace, and the poor folk not lead astray! What spirit has given the pope the authority to canonize the saints? Who tells him whether they are saints or not? Are there not already sins enough on earth, that we too must tempt God, interfere in His judgment and set up the dear saints as lures for money?

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

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

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

My advice is this: If such fool's-work cannot be abolished, then every pious Christian man should open his eyes, and not be misled by the hypocritical Roman bulls and seals, stay at home in his own church

and be content with his baptism, his Gospel, his faith, his Christ and with God, Who is everywhere the same; and let the pope remain a blind leader of the blind. (Matt. 15:4) Neither angel nor pope can give you as much as God gives you in your parish-church. Nay, the pope leads you away from the gifts of God, which you have without pay, to his gifts, which you must buy; and he have without pay, to his gifts, which you must buy; and 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. You see this before your very eyes, but you are unwilling to notice it. If you are to ride to heaven on his wax and parchment, your chariot will soon go to pieces, and you will fall into hell, not in God's name!

Let this be your fixed rule: What you must buy from the pope is neither good nor of God; for what is from God, to wit, the Gospel and the works of God; for what is from God, to wit, the Gospel and the works of God, is not only given without money, but the whole world is punished and damned because it has not been willing to receive it as a free gift. We have deserved of God that we should be so deceived, because we have despised His holy Word and the grace of baptism, as St. Paul says: 2 Thess. 2:11 f.: "God shall send a strong delusion upon all those who have not received the truth to their salvation, to the end that they may believe and follow after lies and knavery," which serves them right.

- One of our greatest necessities is the abolition of all begging throughout Christendom. Among Christians no one ought to go begging! It would also be easy to make a law, if only we had the courage and the serious intention, to the effect that every city should provide for its own poor, and admit no foreign beggars by whatever name they might be called, whether pilgrims or mendicant monks. Every city could support its own poor, and if it were too small, the people in the surrounding villages also should be exhorted to contribute, since in any case they have to feed so many vagabonds and knaves in the guise of mendicants. In this way, too, it could be known who were really poor and who not.

There would have to be an overseer or warden who knew all the poor and informed the city council or the priests what they needed; or some other better arrangement might be made. In my judgment there is no other business in which so much knavery and deceit are practiced as in begging, and yet it could all be easily abolished. Moreover, this free and universal begging hurts the common people. I have considered that each of the five or six mendicant orders visits the same place more than six or seven times every year; besides these there are the common beggars, the "stationaries" and the palmers, so that it has been reckoned that every town is laid under tribute about sixty times a year, not counting what is given to the government in taxes, imposts and assessments, what is stolen by the Roman See with its wares, and what is uselessly consumed. Thus it seems to me one of God's greatest miracles that we can continue to support ourselves.

To be sure, some think that in this way the poor would not be so well provided for and that not so many great stone houses and monasteries would be built. This I can well believe. Nor is it necessary. He who wishes to be poor should not be rich; and if he wishes to be rich, let him put his hand to the plow and seek his riches in the earth! It is enough if the poor are decently cared for, so that they do not die of hunger or of 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 discomfort, according to the present perverted custom; for St.

Paul says, 2 Thess. 3:10: "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat." God has not decreed that any man shall live from another's goods save only the priests, who rule and preach, and these because of their spiritual labor, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:14, and Christ also says to the Apostles, Luke 10:7: "Every laborer is worthy of his hire."

- It is also to be feared that the many masses which are endowed in the foundation and monasteries are not only of little use, but greatly arouse the wrath of God. It would therefore be profitable not to endow any more, but rather to abolish many that are already endowed, since we see that they are regarded only as sacrifices and good works, though they are really sacraments, just like baptism and penance, which profit only those who receive them, and no others. But now the custom has crept in, that masses are said for the living and the dead, and all hopes are built upon them; for this reason so many of them have been founded and the present state of affairs has come about.

My proposal is perhaps too novel and daring, especially for those who fear that through the discontinuance of these masses their trade and livelihood may be destroyed, and so I must refrain from saying more about it until we have come back to a correct understanding of what the mass is and what it is good for. These many years, alas, it has been made a trade practiced for a temporal livelihood, so that I would henceforth advise a man to become a shepherd or to seek some other trade rather than become a shepherd or to seek some other trade rather than become a priest or a monk, unless he first knows well what it is to celebrate mass.

I am not speaking, however, of the old foundations and cathedrals, which were doubtless established in order that the children of the nobility (since, according to the customs of the German nation not all of them can become heirs or rulers), might be provided for in these foundations, and there be free to serve God, to study, to become scholars and to make scholars. But I am speaking of the new foundations, which have been established only for the saying of prayers and masses; for after their example, even the old foundations have been burdened with like prayers and masses, so that they are of little or no profit; though it is also of God's grace that they too come at last, as they deserve, to the dregs, i.e., to the wailing of organs and of choral singers, and to dead, cold masses, by which the incomes of the worldly endowments are gotten and spent. Such things pope, bishops and doctors should examine and proscribe: but now it is they who are most given to them. They let everything pass, if only it brings in money; one blind man is always leading another. This is the work of avarice and of the spiritual law.

Again, no one person should be allowed any longer to hold more than one canonry or prebend. He must be content with a modest position, that some one 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 a proper station." A "proper station" might be so broadly interpreted that a whole land would not be enough to maintain it! Moreover avarice and veiled distrust of God assuredly go with it, so that what is alleged to be the need of "a proper station" is often nothing else than avarice and distrust.

- Sodalities, indulgences, letters of indulgence, "butter-letter," mass-letters, dispensations, and everything else of the sort, are to be drowned and destroyed. There is nothing good in them. If the pope has the power to grant you dispensation to eat butter and to absent yourself from mass, then he ought also be able to leave this power to the priests, from whom, indeed, he has no right to take it. I speak especially of those fraternities in which indulgences, masses and good works are portioned out. Dear friend, in your baptism you entered into a fraternity with Christ, all the angels, saints and Christians on earth. Hold to this fraternity and live up to its demands, and you have fraternities enough. The others -- let them glitter as they will -- are but as counters compared with guldens. But if there were a fraternity which contributed money to feed the poor or to help somebody in some other way, such a one would be good, and would have its indulgence and its merit in heaven. Now, however, they have become excuses for gluttony and drunkenness.

Above all, we should drive out of German lands the papal legates with their "faculties," which they sell us for large sums of money, though that is sheer knavery. For example, in return for money they legalize unjust gains, dissolve oaths, vows and agreements, break and teach men to break the faith and fealty which they have pledged to one another; and they say the pope has the authority to do this. It is the evil Spirit who bids them say this. Thus they sell us a doctrine of devils, and take money for teaching us sin and leading us to hell. If there were no other evil wiles to prove the pope the true Antichrist, yet this one thing were enough to prove it. Hearest thou this, O pope, not most holy, but most sinful? O that God from heaven would soon destroy thy throne and sink it in the abyss of hell! Who hath given thee authority to exalt thyself above thy God, to break and to loose His commandments, and to teach Christians, especially the German nation, praised in all history for its nobility, its constancy and fidelity, to be inconstant, perjurers, traitors, profligates, faithless? God hath commanded to keep oath and faith even with an enemy, and thou undertakest to loose this His commandment, and ordainest in thine heretical, antichristian decretals that thou hast His power. Thus through thy throat and through thy pen the wicked Satan doth lie as he hath never lied before. O Christ, my Lord, look down, let the day of thy judgment break, and destroy the devil's nest at Rome! Here sitteth the man of whom St. Paul hath said (2 Thess. 2:3 f.) that he shall exalt himself above Thee, sit in Thy Church and set himself up as God, -- the man of sin and the son of perdition! What else is the papal power than only the teaching and increasing of sin and evil, the leading of souls to damnation under Thy name and guise?

In olden times the children of Israel had to keep the oath which they had unwittingly been deceived into giving to their enemies, the Gibeonites, and King Zedekiah was miserably lost, with all his people, because he broke this oath to the King of Babylon. (Josh. 9:19 ff.; 2 Kings 24:20; 25:4 ff.) Even among us, a hundred years ago, that fine king of Hungary and Poland, Wladislav, was slain by the Turk, with so many noble people, because he allowed himself to be deceived by the papal legate and cardinal, and broke the good and advantageous treaty which he had sworn with the Turk. The pious Emperor Sigismund had no good fortune after the Council of Constance, when allowed the knaves to break the safe-conduct which had been given to John Hus and Jerome, and all the trouble between us and the Bohemians was the consequence. Even in our own times, God help us! How much Christian blood has been shed over the oath and alliance which Pope Julius made between the Emperor Maximilian and King Louis of France, and afterwards broke? How could I tell all the troubles which the popes have stirred up by the devilish presumption with which they annul oaths and vows which have been made

between great princes, making a jest of these things, and taking money for it. I have hopes that the judgment day is at the door; nothing can possibly be worse than the Roman See. He suppresses God's commandment, he exalts his own commandment over it; if he is not Antichrist, then let some one else tell who he can be! But more of this another time, and better.

- It is high time that we seriously and honestly consider the case of the Bohemians, and come into union with them so that the terrible slander, hatred and envy on both sides may cease. As befits my folly, I shall be the first to submit an opinion on this subject, with due deference to every one who may understand the case better than I.

First, We must honestly confess the truth, stop justifying ourselves, and grant the Bohemians that John Hus and Jerome of Prague were burned at Constance in violation of the papal, Christian, imperial safe-conduct and oath; whereby God's commandment was sinned against and the Bohemians were given ample cause for bitterness; and although they ought to have been perfect and to have patiently endured this great injustice and disobedience of God on our part, nevertheless they were not bound to approve of it and to acknowledge that it was well done. Nay, even to-day they should give up life and limb rather than confess that it is right to violate an imperial, papal Christian safe-conduct, and faithlessly to act contrary to it. So then, although it is the impatience of the Bohemians which is at fault, yet the pope and his followers are still more to blame for all the trouble, error and loss of souls that have followed upon that council. I have no desire to pass judgment at this time upon John Hus's articles or to defend his errors, though I have not yet found any errors in his writings, and I am quite prepared to believe that it was neither fair judgment nor honest condemnation which was passed by those who, in their faithless dealing, violated a Christian safe-conduct and a commandment of God. Beyond doubt they were possessed rather by the evil spirit than by the Holy Spirit. No one will doubt that the Holy Spirit does not act contrary to the commandment of God; and no one is so ignorant as not to know that the violation of faith and of a safe-conduct is contrary to the commandment of God, even though they had been promised to the devil himself, still more when the promise was made to a mere heretic. It is also quite evident that such a promise was made to John Hus and the Bohemians and was not kept, but that he was burned in spite of it. I do not wish, however, to make John Hus a saint or a martyr, as do some of the Bohemians, though I confess that injustice was done 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.

All I wish to say is this: though he were never so wicked a heretic, nevertheless he was burned unjustly and against God's commandment, and the Bohemians should not be forced to approve of such conduct, or else we shall never come into unity. Not obstinacy but the open admission of truth must make us one. It is useless to pretend, as was done at the time, that a safe-conduct given to a heretic need not be kept. That is as much as to say that God's commandments are not to be kept to the end that God's commandments may be kept. The devil made them mad and foolish, so that they did not know what they were saying or doing. God has commanded that a safe-conduct shall be kept. This commandment we should keep though the world fall. How much more, when it is only a question of freeing a heretic! We should vanquish heretics with books, not with burning; for so the ancient fathers did. If it were a science to vanquish the heretics with fire, then the hangmen would be the most learned doctors on

earth; we should no longer need to study, but he who overcame another by force might burn him at the stake.

Second, The emperor and the princes should send to the Bohemians some pious and sensible bishops and scholars; but by no means a cardinal or papal legate or inquisitor, for those people are utter ignoramuses as regards things Christian; they seek not the welfare of souls but, like all the pope's hypocrites, only their own power, profit and glory' indeed, they were the prime movers in this miserable business at Constance. The men thus sent into Bohemia should inform themselves about the faith of the Bohemians, and whether it be possible to unite all their sects. Then the pope should, for their souls' sake, lay aside his supremacy for the time being, and, according to the decree of the most Christian Council of Nicaea, allow the Bohemians to choose one of their number to be Archbishop of Prague, and he should be confirmed by the bishop of Olmutz 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. The pope has no right to oppose such an arrangement, and if he does oppose it, he becomes a wolf and a tyrant; no one should follow him and his ban should be met with a counter-ban.

If, however, it were desired, in honor of the See of St. Peter, to do this with the pope's consent, I should be satisfied, provided it does not cost the Bohemians a heller and the pope does not bind them at all nor make them subject to his tyrannies by oaths and obligations, as he does all other bishops, in despite of God and of justice. If he will not be satisfied with the honor of having his consent asked, then let them not bother any more about him and his rights, laws and tyrannies; let the election suffice, and let the blood of all the souls which are endangered cry out against him, for no one should consent to injustice; it is enough to have offered tyranny an honor. If it cannot be otherwise, then an election and approval by the common people can even now be quite as valid as a confirmation by a tyrant; but I hope this will not be necessary. Some of the Romans or the good bishops and scholars will sometime dare and oppose papal tyranny.

I would also advise against compelling them to abolish both kinds in the sacrament, since that is neither unchristian nor heretical, but they should be allowed to retain their own practice, if they wish. Yet the new bishop should be careful that no discord arise because of such a practice is wrong; just as it ought not to cause dissension that the clergy differ from the laity in manner of life and in dress. In like manner if they were unwilling to receive the Roman canon law, they should not be forced to do so, but we should first make sure that they live in accordance with faith and with the Scriptures. For Christian faith and life can well exist without the intolerable laws of the pope, nay, they cannot well exist unless there be fewer of these Roman laws, or none at all. In baptism we have become free and have been made subject to God's Word only; why should any man ensnare us in his words? As St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 7:23 and Gal. 5:1: "Ye have become free, be not servants of men," i.e. of those who rule with man-made laws.

If I knew that the Picards held no other error touching the sacrament of the altar except that they believe that the bread and wine are present in their true nature, but that the body and blood of Christ are truly present under them, then I would not condemn them, but would let them enter the obedience of the bishop of Prague. For it is not an article of faith that bread and wine are not essentially and naturally in the sacrament, but this is an opinion of St. Thomas and the pope. On the other hand, it is an article of faith that in the natural bread and wine the true natural body and blood of Christ are present. And so we should tolerate the opinions of both sides until they come to an agreement, because there is no danger in believing that bread is there or is not there. For we have to endure many practices and ordinances so long as they are not harmful to faith. On the other hand, if they had a different faith, I would rather have them outside the Church; yet I would teach them the truth. Whatever other errors and schisms might be discovered in Bohemia should be tolerated until the archbishop had been restored and had gradually brought all the people together again in one common doctrine. They will assuredly never be united by force, nor by defiance, nor by haste; it will take time and forbearance. Had not even Christ to tarry with His disciples a long while and bear with their unbelief, until they believed His resurrections? If they but had again a regular bishop and church order, without Roman tyranny, I could hope 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, it is in our power, for the sake of unity, to give them these things and let them keep them in the sight of God and men. For Christ says, Matt. 18:19 f.: "Where two are at one with each other on earth, there am I in the midst of them." Would to God that on both sides we were working toward this unity, offering our hands to one another in brotherly humility, and not standing stubbornly on our powers or rights! Love is greater and more necessary than the papacy at Rome, for there can be papacy without love and love without papacy.

With this counsel I shall have done what I could. If the pope or his followers hinder it, (Phil. 2:4), they shall render an account for seeking their own things rather than the things of their neighbor, contrary to the love of God. The pope ought to give up his papacy and all his possessions and honors, if he could by that means save one soul; but now he would let the world go to destruction rather than yield a hair's-breadth of his presumptuous authority. And yet he would be the "most holy"! Here my responsibility ends.

Part Three

- The universities also need a good, thorough reformation -- I must say it no matter whom it vexes -- for everything which the papacy has instituted and ordered is directed only towards the increasing of sin and error. What else are the universities, if their present condition remains unchanged, than as the book of Maccabees says, 2 Macc. 4:9, 12: *Gymnasia Epheborum et Graecae gloriae*, in which loose living prevails, the Holy Scriptures and the Christian faith are little taught, and the blind, heathen master Aristotle rules alone, even more than Christ. In this regard my advice would be that Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *On the Soul*, *Ethics*, which have hitherto been thought his best books, should be altogether discarded, together with all the rest of his books which boast of treating the things of nature, although nothing can be learned from the either of the things of

nature or the things of the Spirit. Moreover no one has so far understood his meaning, and many souls have been burdened with profitless labor and study, at the cost of much precious time. I venture to say that any potter has more knowledge of nature than is written in these books. It grieves me to the heart that this damned, conceited, rascally heathen has with his false words deluded and made fools of so many of the best Christians. God has sent him as a plague upon us for our sins.

Why, this wretched man, in his best book, *On the Soul*, teaches that the soul dies with the body, although many have tried with vain words to save his reputation. As though we had not the Holy Scriptures, in which we are abundantly instructed about all things, and of them Aristotle had not the faintest inkling! And yet this dead heathen has conquered and obstructed and almost suppressed the books of the living God, so that when I think of this miserable business I can believe nothing else than that the evil spirit has introduced the study of Aristotle.

Again, 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 all Christians! Let no one accuse me of exaggeration, or of condemning what I do not understand! My dear friend, I know well whereof I speak. I know my Aristotle as well as you or the likes of you. I have lectured on him and heard lectures on him, and I understand him better than do St. Thomas or Scotus. This I can say without pride, and if necessary I can prove it. I care not that so many great minds have wearied themselves over him for so many hundred years. 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 should be glad to see Aristotle's books on *Logic*, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* retained or used in an abridged form as text-books for the profitable training of young people in speaking and preaching. But the commentaries and notes should be abolished, and as Cicero's *Rhetoric* is read without commentaries and notes, so Aristotle's *Logic* should be read as it is, without such a mass of comments. But now neither speaking nor preaching is learned from it, and it has become nothing but a disputing and a weariness to the flesh.

Besides this there are the languages -- Latin, Greek and Hebrew -- the mathematical disciplines and history. But all this I give over to the specialists, and, indeed, the reform would come of itself, if we were only seriously bent upon it. In truth, much depends upon it; for it is here that the Christian youth and the best of our people, with whom the future of Christendom lies, are to be educated and trained. Therefore I consider that there is no work more worthy of pope or emperor than a thorough reformation of the universities, and there is nothing worse or more worthy of the devil than unreformed universities.

The medical men I leave to reform their own faculties; the jurists and theologians I take as my share, and I say, in the first place, that it were well if the canon law, from the first letter to the last, and especially the decretals, were utterly blotted out. The Bible contains more than enough directions for all our living, and so the study of the canon law only stands in the way of the study of the Holy Scriptures; moreover, it smacks for the most part of mere avarice and pride. Even though there were much in it that is good, it might as well be destroyed, for the pope has taken the whole canon law captive and imprisoned it in

the "chamber of his hear, so that the study of it is henceforth a waste of time and a farce. At present the canon law is not what is in the books, but what is in the sweet will of the pope and his flatterers. Your cause may be thoroughly established in the canon law; still the pope has his *scrinium pectoris*, and all law and the whole world must be guided by that. Now it is oft times a knave, and even the devil himself, who rules this *scrinium*, and they boast that it is ruled by the Holy Spirit! Thus they deal with Christ's unfortunate people. They give them many laws and themselves keep none of them, but others they compel either to keep them or else to buy release. Since, then, the pope and his followers have suspended the whole canon law, and since they pay no heed to it, but regard their own wanton will as a law exalting them above all the world, we should follow their example and for our part also reject these books. Why should we waste our time studying them? We could never discover the whole arbitrary will of the pope, which has now become the canon law. The canon law has arisen in the devil's name, let it fall in the name of God, and let there be no more *doctores decretorum* in the work, but only *doctores scrinii papalis*, that is, "hypocrites of the pope"! 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; and we must confess that there is no more shameful rule than among us, with our spiritual and temporal law, so that there is no estate which lives according to the light of nature, still less according to Holy Scripture.

The temporal law, -- God help us! What a wilderness it has become! Though it is much better, wiser and more rational than the "spiritual law" which has nothing good about it except the name, still there is far too much of it. Surely the Holy Scriptures and good rulers would be law enough; as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:1: "Is there no one among you can judge his neighbor's cause, that ye must go to law before heathen courts?" It seems just to me that territorial laws and territorial customs should take precedence of the general imperial laws, and the imperial laws be used only in case of necessity. Would to God that as every land has its own peculiar character, so it were ruled by its own brief laws, as the lands were ruled before these imperial laws were invented, and many lands are still ruled without them! These diffuse and far-fetched laws are only a burden to the people, and hinder causes more than they help them. I hope, however, that others have given this matter more thought and attention than I am able to do.

My friends the theologians have spared themselves pains and labor; they leave the Bible in peace and read the Sentences. I should think that the Sentences ought to be the first study of young students in theology and the Bible ought to be the study for the doctors. But now it is turned around; the Bible come first, and is put aside when the bachelor's degree is reached, and the Sentences come last. They are attached forever to the doctorate, and that with such a solemn obligation that a man who is not a priest may indeed read may indeed the Bible, but the Sentences a priest must read. A married man, I observe, could be a Doctor of the Bible, but under no circumstances a Doctor of the Sentences. What good fortune can we expect if we act so perversely and in this way put the Bible, the holy Word of God, so far to the rear? Moreover the pope commands, with many severe words, that his laws are to be read and used in the schools and the courts, but little is said of the Gospel. Thus it is the custom that in the schools and the courts the Gospel lies idle in the dust under the bench, to the end that the pope's harmful laws may rule alone.

If we are called by the title of teachers of Holy Scripture, then we ought to be compelled, in accordance with our name, to teach the Holy Scriptures and nothing else, although even this title is too proud and boastful and no one ought to be proclaimed and crowned teacher of Holy Scripture. Yet it might be suffered, if the work justified the name; but now, under the despotism of the Sentences, we find among the theologians more of heathen and human opinion than of the holy and certain doctrine of Scripture. What, then, are we to do? I know of no other way than humbly to pray God to give us Doctors of Theology. Pope, emperor and universities may make Doctors of Arts, of Medicine, of Laws, of the Sentences; but be assured that no one will make a Doctor of Holy Scripture, save only the Holy Ghost from heaven, as Christ says in John 6:45: "They must all be taught of God Himself." Now the Holy Ghost does not concern Himself about red or brown birettas or other decorations, nor does He ask whether one is old or young, layman or priest, monk or secular, virgin or married; nay He spake of old by an ass, against the prophet who rode upon it. (Number 22:28). Would God that we were worthy to have such doctors given us, whether they were layman or priests, married or virgin. True, they now try to force the Holy Ghost into pope, bishops and doctors, although there is no sign or indication whatever that He is in them.

The number of theological books must also be lessened, and a selection made of the best of them. For it is not many books or much reading that makes men learned; but it is good things, however little of them, often read, that make men learned in the Scriptures, and make them godly, too. Indeed the writings of all the holy fathers should be read only for a time, in order that through them we may be led to the Holy Scriptures. As it is, however, we read them only to be absorbed in them and never come to the Scriptures. We are like men who study the sign-posts and never travel the road. The dear fathers wished, by their writings, to lead us to the Scriptures, but we so use them as to be led away from the Scriptures, though the Scriptures alone are our vineyard in which we ought to work and toil.

Above all, the foremost and most general subject of study, both in the higher and the lower schools, should be the Holy Scriptures, and for the young boys the Gospel. And would to God that every town had a girl's school also, in which the girls were taught the Gospel for an hour each day either in German or Latin. Indeed the schools, 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. Agnes and other of the saints. That was the time of holy virgins and martyrs, and then it was well with Christendom; but now they have come to nothing but praying and singing. Ought not every Christian at his ninth or tenth year to know the entire holy Gospel from which he derives his name and his life? A spinner or a seamstress teaches her daughter the trade in her early years; but now even the great, learned prelates and bishops themselves do not know the Gospel.

O how unjustly we deal with these poor young people who are committed to us for direction and instruction! We must give a terrible accounting for our neglect to set the Word of God before them. They fare as Jeremiah says in Lamentations 2:11 ff.: "Mine eyes are grown weary with weeping, my bowels are terrified, my liver 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 whole city; they said to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine? And they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city and gave up the ghost in their mothers' bosom." This pitiful evil we do not see, -- how even now the young

folk in the midst of Christendom languish and perish miserably for want of the Gospel, in which we ought to be giving them constant instruction and training. Moreover, if the universities were diligent in the study of Holy Scripture, we should not send everybody there, as we do when all we ask is numbers, and everyone wishes to have a doctor's degree; but we should send only the best qualified students, who have previously 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. But where the Holy Scriptures do not rule, there I advise no one to send his son. Everyone not unceasingly busy with the Word of God must become corrupt; that is why the people who are in the universities and who are trained there are the kind of people they are. For this no one is to blame with the training of the youth. For the universities ought to turn out only men who are experts in the Holy Scriptures, who can become bishops and priests, leaders in the fight against heretics, the devil and all the world. But where do you find this true? I greatly fear that the universities are wide gates of hell, if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scriptures and impress them on the youth.

- I know full well that the Roman crowd will make pretensions and great boasts about how the pope took the Holy Roman Empire from the Greek Emperor and bestowed it on the Germans, for which honor and benevolence he is said to have justly deserved and obtained from the Germans submission and thanks and all good things. For this reason they will, perhaps, undertake to throw to the winds all attempts to reform them, and will not allow us to think about anything but the bestowal of the Roman Empire. For this cause they have heretofore persecuted and oppressed many a worthy emperor so arbitrarily and arrogantly that it is pity to tell of it, and with the same adroitness they have made themselves overlords of all the temporal powers and authorities, contrary to the Holy Gospel. Of this too I must therefore speak.

There is no doubt that the true Roman Empire, which the writings of the prophets foretold in Numbers 24:24 and in Daniel 2:39 ff., has long since been overthrown and brought to an end, as Balaam clearly prophesied in Numbers 24:24:, when he said: "The Romans shall come and overthrow the Jews; and afterwards they also shall be destroyed." That was brought to pass by the Goths, but especially when the Turkish Empire arose almost a thousand years ago, then in time Asia and Africa fell away, and finally Venice arose, and there remained to Rome nothing of its former power.

Now when the pope could not subdue to his arrogant will the Greeks and the emperor at Constantinople, who was hereditary Roman Emperor, he bethought himself of this device, viz., to rob him of his empire and his title and turn it over to the Germans, who were at that time warlike and of good repute, so as to bring the power of the Roman Empire under his control and give it away as a fief. So too it turned out. It was taken away from the emperor at Constantinople and its name and title were given to us Germans. Thereby we became the servants of the pope, and there is now a second Roman Empire, which the pope has built upon the Germans; for the other, which was first, has long since fallen, as I have said.

So then the Roman See has its will. It has taken possession of Rome, driven out the German Emperor and bound him with oaths not to dwell at Rome. He is to be Roman Emperor, and yet he is not to have possession of Rome, and besides he is at all times to be dependent upon the caprice of the pope and his followers, so that we have the name and they have the land and cities. hey have always abused our

simplicity to serve their own arrogance and tyranny, and they call us mad Germans, who let ourselves be made apes and fools at their bidding.

Ah well! For God the Lord it is a small thing to toss empires and principalities to and fro! He is so generous with them that once in a while He gives a kingdom to a knave and takes it from a good man, sometimes by the treachery of wicked, faithless men and sometimes by heredity, as we read of the Kingdoms of Persia and Greece, and of almost all kingdoms; and Daniel 2:21 and 4:14 says: "He Who ruleth over all things dwelleth in heaven, and it is He alone Who changeth kingdoms, tosseth them to and fro, and maketh them." Since, therefore, no one can think it a great thing to have a kingdom given him, especially if he is a Christian, we Germans too cannot be puffed up because a new Roman Empire is bestowed on us; for in His eyes it is a trifling gift, which He often gives to the most unworthy, as Daniel 4:35 says: "All who dwell upon the earth are in His eyes as nothing, and He has power in all the kingdoms of men, to give them to whomsoever He will."

But although the pope unjustly and by violence robbed the true emperor of his Roman Empire, or of its name, and gave it to us Germans, it is certain, nevertheless, that in this matter 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, which still exists. And although we gave no occasion to this wickedness of the popes, and did not understand their false aims and purposes, nevertheless, through this papal trickery and roguery, we have already paid too dearly for our empire, with incalculable bloodshed, with the suppression of our liberty, with the risk of robbery of all our goods, especially the goods of the churches and canonries, and with the suffering of unspeakable deception and insult. We have the name of the empire, but the pope has our wealth, honor, body, life, soul and all that is ours. So we Germans are to be cheated in the trade. What the popes sought was to be emperors, and since they could not manage that, they at least succeeded in setting themselves over the emperors.

Because then, the empire has been given us without our fault, by the providence of God and the plotting of evil men, I would not advise that we give it up, but rather that we rule it wisely and in the fear of God, so long as it shall please Him. For, as has been said, it matters not to Him where an empire comes from; it is His will that it shall be ruled. Though the popes took it dishonestly from others, nevertheless we did not get it dishonestly. It is given us by the will of God through evil-minded men; and we have more regard for God's will than for the treacherous purpose of the popes, who, in bestowing it, wished to be emperors themselves, and more than emperors, and only to fool and mock us with the name. The King of Babylon also seized his empire by robbery and force; yet it was God's will that it should be ruled by the holy princes, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael; much more then is it His will that this empire be ruled by the Christian princes of Germany, regardless whether the pope stole it, or got it by robbery, or made it anew. It is all God's ordering, which came to pass before we knew of it.

Therefore the pope and his followers may not boast that they have done a great favor to the German nation by the bestowal of this Roman Empire. First, because they did not mean it for our good, but were rather taking advantage of our simplicity in order to strengthen themselves in their proud designs against the Roman Emperor at Constantinople, from whom the pope godlessly and lawlessly took this empire, a thing which he had no right to do. Second, because the pope's intention was not to give us the empire, but to get it for myself, that he might bring all our power, our freedom, wealth, body and soul into subjection to himself and use us (if God had not prevented) to subdue all the world. He clearly says so himself in his decretals, and he has attempted it, by many evil wiles, with a number of the German emperors. How beautifully we Germans have been taught our German! When we thought to be lords, we became slaves of the most deceitful tyrants; we have the name, title and insignia of the empire, but the pope has its treasures, its authority, its law and its liberty. So the pope gobbles the kernel, and we play with the empty hulls.

Now may God, Who by the wiles of tyrants has tossed this empire into our lap, and charged us with the ruling of it, help us to live up to the name, title and insignia, to rescue our liberty, and to show the Romans, for once, what it is that we, through them, have received from God! They boast that they have bestowed on us an empire. So be it, then! If it is true, then let the pope give us Rome and everything else which he has got from the empire; let him free our land from his intolerable taxing and robbing, and give us back our liberty, authority, wealth, honor, body and soul; let the empire be what an empire should be, and let his words and pretensions be fulfilled!

If he will not do that, they why all this shamming, these false and lying words and juggler's tricks? Is he not satisfied with having so rudely led this noble nation by the nose these many hundred years without ceasing? It does not follow that the pope must be above an emperor because he makes or crowns him. The prophet Samuel at God's command anointed and crowned Kings Saul and David, and yet he was their subject (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13); and the prophet Nathan anointed King Solomon, but was not set over him on that account (1 Kings 1:38 f.); Elisha too had one of his servants anoint Jehu King of Israel, and yet they remained obedient and subject to him (2 Kings 9:1 ff.). Except in the case of the pope, it has never happened in all the world's history that he who consecrated or crowned the king was over the king. He lets himself be crowned pope by three cardinals, who are under him, and he is nevertheless their superior. Why then should he, contrary to the example which he himself sets, and contrary to the custom and teaching of all the world and of the Scriptures, exalt himself above temporal authorities, or the empire, simply because he crowns or consecrates the emperor? It is enough that he should be the emperor's superior in divine things, to wit, in preaching, teaching and administering the sacraments, in which things, indeed, any bishop or priest is over every other man, as St. Ambrose in his See was over the emperor Theodosius, and the prophet Nathan over David, and Samuel over Saul. Therefore, let the German Emperor be really and truly emperor, and let not his authority or his sword be put down by this blind pretension of papal hypocrites, as though they were to be excepted from his dominion and themselves direct the temporal sword in all things.

- Enough has now been said about the failings of the clergy, though more of them can and will be found if these are properly considered. We would say something too about the failings of the temporal estate.
- There is great need of a general law and decree of the German nation against the extravagance and excess in dress, by which so many nobles and rich men are impoverished. God has given to us, as to other lands, enough wool, hair, flax and everything else which properly serves for the seemly and honorable dress of every rank, so that we do not need to spend and waste such enormous sums for silk and velvet and golden ornaments and other foreign wares. I believe that even if the pope had not robbed us Germans with his intolerable exactions, we should still have our hands more than full with these domestic robbers, the silk and velvet merchants. In the matter of clothes, as we see, everybody wants to be equal to everybody else, and pride and envy are aroused and increased among us, as we deserve. All this and much more misery would be avoided if our curiosity would only let us be thankful, and be satisfied with the goods which God has given us.² In like manner it is also necessary to restrict the spice-traffic which is another of the great ships in which money is carried out of German lands. There grows among us, by God's grace, more to eat and drink than in any other land, and just as choice and good. Perhaps the proposals that I make may seem foolish and impossible and give the impression that I want to suppress the greatest of all trades, that of commerce; but I am doing what I can. If reforms are not generally introduced, then let every one who is willing reform himself. I do not see that many good customs have ever come to a land through commerce, and in ancient times God made His people of Israel dwell away from the sea on this account, and did not let them engage much in commerce.³ But the greatest misfortune of the German nation is certainly the traffic in annuities. If that did not exist many a man would have to leave unbought his silk, velvets, golden ornaments, spices and ornaments of every sort. It has not existed much over a hundred years, and has already brought almost all princes, cities, endowed institutions, nobles and their heirs to poverty, misery and ruin; if it shall continue for another hundred years Germany cannot possibly have a pfennig left and we shall certainly have to devour one another. The devil invented the practice, and the pope, by confirming it, has injured the whole world. Therefore I ask and pray that everyone open his eyes to see the ruin of himself, his children and his heirs, which not only stands before the door, but already haunts the house, and that emperor, princes, lords and cities do their part that this trade be condemned as speedily as possible, and henceforth prevented, regardless whether or not the pope, with all his law and unlaw, is opposed to it, and whether or not benefices or church foundations are based upon it. It is better that there should be in a city one living based on an honest freehold or revenue, than a hundred based on an annuity; indeed a living based on an annuity is worse and more grievous than twenty based on freeholds. In truth this traffic in rents must be a sign and symbol that the world, for its grievous sins, has been sold to the devil, so that both temporal and spiritual possessions must fail us, and yet we do not notice it at all. Here, too, we must put a bit in the mouth of the Fuggers and similar corporations; and that, too, by another way than agriculture or cattle-raising, in which increase of wealth depends not on human wits, but on God's blessing. I commend this to the men of affairs. I am a theologian, and find nothing to blame in it except its evil and offending appearance, of which St. Paul says, 1 Thess. 5:22: "Avoid every appearance or show of evil."

This I know well, that it would be much more pleasing to God if we increased agriculture and diminished commerce, and that they do much better who, according to the Scriptures, till the soil and seek their living from it, as was said to us and to all men in Adam, Gen. 3:17 ff.: "Accursed be the earth when thou laborest therein, it shall bear thee thistles and thorns, and in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread." There is still much land lying untilled.⁴ Next comes the abuse of eating and drinking which gives us Germans a bad reputation in foreign lands, as though it were our special vice. Preaching cannot stop it; it has become too common, and has got too firmly the upper hand. The waste of money which it causes would be a small thing, were it not followed by other sins, -- murder, adultery, stealing, irreverence and all the vices. The temporal sword can do something to prevent it; or else it will be as Christ says: Luke 21:34 f.: "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." It is so much like that now that I verily believe the judgment day is at the door, though men are thinking least of all about it.⁵ Finally is it not a pitiful thing that we Christians should be maintain among us open and common houses of prostitution, though all of us are baptized unto chastity? I know very well what some say to this, to wit, that it is not the custom of any one people, that it is hard to break up, that it is better that there should be such houses than that married women, or maidens, or those of more honorable estate should be outraged. But should not the temporal, Christian government consider that in this heathen way the evil is not to be controlled? If the people of Israel could exist without such an abomination, why could not Christian people do as much? Nay, how do many cities, towns and villages exist without such houses? Why should not great cities exist without them?

In this, and in the other matters above mentioned, I have tried to point out how many good works the temporal government could do, and what should be the duty of every government, to the end that every one may learn what an awful responsibility it is to rule, and to have high station. What good would it do that an overlord were in his own life as holy as St. Peter, if he have not the purpose diligently to help his subjects in these matters? His very authority will condemn him! For it is the duty of the authorities to seek the highest good of their subjects. But if the authorities were to consider how the young people might be brought together in marriage, the hope of entering the married state would greatly help every one to endure and to resist temptation.

But now every man is drawn to the priesthood or the monastic life, and among them, I fear, 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 in the estate of matrimony. Therefore they live wildly enough beforehand, and wish, as they say, to "wear out their lust," but rather wear it in, as experience shows. I find the proverb true, "Despair makes most of the monks and priests"; and so things are as we see them.

My faithful counsel is that, in order to avoid many sins which have become very common, neither boy nor maid should take the vow of chastity, or of the "spiritual life," before the age of thirty years. It is, as St. Paul says, a peculiar gift. Therefore let him whom God does not constrain (1 Cor. 7:7), put off becoming a cleric and taking the vows. Nay, I will go farther and say, If you trust God so little that you are not willing to support yourself as a married man, and wish to become a cleric only because of this distrust, then for the sake of your own soul, I beg of you not to become a cleric, but rather a farmer, or

whatever else you please. For if to obtain your temporal support you must have one measure of trust in God, you must have ten measures of trust to continue in the life of cleric. If you do not trust God to support you in the world, how will you trust him to support you in the Church? Alas, unbelief and distrust spoil everything and lead us into all misery, as we see in every estate of life!

Much could be said of this miserable condition. The young people have no one to care for them. They all do as they please, and the government is of as much use to them as if it did not exist; and yet this should be the chief concern of pope, bishops, lords and councils. They wish to rule far and wide, and yet to help on one. O, what a rare bird will a lord and ruler be in heaven just on this account, even though he build a hundred churches for God and raise up all the dead!

Let this suffice for this time! Of what the temporal powers and the nobility ought to do, I think I have said enough in the little book, *On Good Works*. There is room for improvement in their lives and in their rule, and yet the abuses of the temporal power are not to be compared with those of the spiritual power, as I have there shown.

I think too that I have pitched my song in a high key, have made many propositions which will be thought impossible and have attacked many things too sharply. But what am I to do? I am in duty bound to speak. If I were able, these are the things I should wish to do. I prefer the wrath of the world to the wrath of God; they can do no more than take my life. Many times heretofore I have made overtures of peace to my opponents; but as I now see, God has through them compelled me to open my mouth wider and wider and give them enough to say, bark, shout and write, since they have nothing else to do. Ah well, I know another little song about Rome and about them! If their ears itch for it I will sing them that sing too, and pitch the notes to the top of the scale. Understandest thou, dear Rome, what I mean?

I have many times offered my writings for investigation and judgment, but it has been of no use. To be sure, I know that if my cause is just, it must be condemned on earth, and approved only by Christ in heaven; for all the Scriptures show that the cause of Christians and of Christendom must be judged by God alone. Such a cause has never yet been approved by men on earth, but the opposition has always been too great and strong. It is my greatest care and fear that my cause may remain uncondemned, by which I should know for certain that it was not yet pleasing to God.

Therefore let them boldly go to work, -- pope, bishop, priest, monk and scholar! They are the right people to persecute the truth, as they have ever done. God give us all a Christian mind, and especially to the Christian nobility of the German nation a right spiritual courage to do the best that can be done for the poor Church. Amen.

Wittenberg 1520

Source: Translated by C. M. Jacobs, in *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915).

Previously prepared for an earlier version of *The Stromata*. Accessed July 2026.

Translation: Author died 1546. Jacobs' 1915 Philadelphia Edition translation, confirmed public domain via publication date and verbatim phrase match against Project Wittenberg. Not the copyrighted *Luther's Works American Edition* (Fortress Press) - confirmed distinct wording.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/open-letter-christian-nobility-ch3-proposals>