

[taken from "Luther's Primary Works", edited by Henry Wace and Carl A. Buchheim, as published by John Murray, Albemarle Street, LONDON, in 1883AD]

Address to the Nobility

by

Martin Luther

Dedicatory Letter

To the respected and worthy Nicolaus von Amsdorff, Licentiate in the Holy Scriptures and Canon of Wittenberg, my particular and affectionate friend.

Dr. Martinus Luther.

The grace and peace of God be with you, respected, worthy Sir, and dear friend!

The time for silence is gone, and the time to speak has come, as we read in Ecclesiastes (iii. 7). I have, in conformity with our resolve, put together some few points concerning the reformation of the Christian estate, with the intent of placing the same before the Christian nobility of the German nation, in case it may please God to help His Church by means of the laity, inasmuch as the clergy, whom this task rather befitted, have become quite careless. I send all this to your worship, to judge and to amend where needed. I am well aware that I shall not escape the reproach of taking far too much upon me in presuming, insignificant and forsaken as I am, to address such high estates on such weighty and great subjects, as if there were no one in the world but Dr. Luther to have a care for Christianity and to give advice to such wise people.

Let who will blame me, I shall not offer any excuse. Perhaps I still owe God and the world another folly. This debt I have now resolved honestly to discharge, as well as may be, and to be Court fool for once in my life; if I fail, I shall at any rate gain this advantage: that no one need buy me a fool's cap or shave my poll. But it remains to be seen which shall hang the bells on the other. I must fulfil the proverb, "When anything is to be done in the world, a monk must be in it, were it only as a painted figure." I suppose it has often happened that a fool has spoken wisely, and wise men have often done foolishly, as St. Paul says, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Cor. iii. 18).

Now, inasmuch as I am not only a fool, but also a sworn doctor of the Holy Scriptures, I am glad that I have an opportunity of fulfilling my oath, just in this fool's way. I beg you to excuse me to the moderately wise, for I know not how to deserve the favour and grace of the supremely wise, which I have so often sought with much labour, but now for the future shall neither have nor regard.

God help us to seek not our glory, but His alone. Amen.

Wittenberg, in the monastery of St. Augustine, on the eve of St. John the Baptist in the year 1520.

JESUS

Address to the Nobility

by
Martin Luther

To his most Serene and Mighty Imperial Majesty and to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.

Dr. Martinus Luther

THE grace and might of God be with you, Most Serene Majesty, most gracious, well-beloved gentlemen!

It is not out of mere arrogance and perversity that I, an individual poor man, have taken upon me to address your lordships. The distress and misery that oppress all the Christian estates, more especially in Germany, have led not only myself, but every one else, to cry aloud and to ask for help, and have now forced me too to cry out and to ask if God would give His Spirit to any one to reach a hand to His wretched people. Councils have often put forward some remedy, but it has adroitly been frustrated, and the evils have become worse, through the cunning of certain men. Their malice and wickedness I will now, by the help of God, expose, so that, being known, they may henceforth cease to be so obstructive and injurious. God has given us a young and noble sovereign, and by this has roused great hopes in many hearts; now it is time that we too should do what we can, and make good use of time and grace.

The first thing that we must do is to consider the matter with great earnestness, and, whatever we attempt, not to trust in our own strength and wisdom alone, even if the power of all the world were ours; for God will not endure that a good work should be begun trusting to our own strength and wisdom. He destroys it; it is all useless, as we read in Psalm xxxiii., "There is no king saved by the multitude of a host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." And I fear it is for that reason that those beloved princes in the Emperors Frederick, the First and the Second, and many other German emperors were, in former times, so piteously spurned and oppressed by the popes, though they were feared by all the world. Perchance they trusted rather in their own strength than in God; therefore they could not but fall; and how would the sanguinary tyrant Julius II. have risen so high in our own days but that, I fear, France, Germany, and Venice trusted to themselves? The children of Benjamin slew forty-two thousand Israelites, for this reason: that these trusted to their own strength (Judges xx., etc.).

That such a thing may not happen to us and to our noble Emperor Charles, we must remember that in this matter we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph. vi. 12), who may fill the world with war and bloodshed, but cannot themselves be overcome thereby. We must renounce all confidence in our natural strength, and take the matter in hand with humble trust in God; we must seek God's help with earnest prayer, and have nothing before our eyes but the misery and wretchedness of Christendom, irrespective of what punishment the wicked may deserve. If

we do not act thus, we may begin the game with great pomp; but when we are well in it, the spirits of evil will make such confusion that the whole world will be immersed in blood, and yet nothing be done. Therefore let us act in the fear of God and prudently. The greater the might of the foe, the greater is the misfortune, if we do not act in the fear of God and with humility. If popes and Romanists have hitherto, with the devil's help, thrown kings into confusion, they may still do so, if we attempt things with our own strength and skill, without God's help.

THE THREE WALLS OF THE ROMANISTS

The Romanists have, with great adroitness, drawn three walls round themselves, with which they have hitherto protected themselves, so that no one could reform them, whereby all Christendom has fallen terribly.

Firstly, if pressed by the temporal power, they have affirmed and maintained that the temporal power has no jurisdiction over them, but, on the contrary, that the spiritual power is above the temporal.

Secondly, if it were proposed to admonish them with the Scriptures, they objected that no one may interpret the Scriptures but the Pope.

Thirdly, if they are threatened with a council, they pretend that no one may call a council but the Pope.

Thus they have secretly stolen our three rods, so that they may be unpunished, and entrenched themselves behind these three walls, to act with all the wickedness and malice, which we now witness. And whenever they have been compelled to call a council, they have made it of no avail by binding the princes beforehand with an oath to leave them as they were, and to give moreover to the Pope full power over the procedure of the council, so that it is all one whether we have many councils or no councils, in addition to which they deceive us with false pretences and tricks. So grievously do they tremble for their skin before a true, free council; and thus they have overawed kings and princes, that these believe they would be offending God, if they were not to obey them in all such knavish, deceitful artifices.

Now may God help us, and give us one of those trumpets that overthrew the walls of Jericho, so that we may blow down these walls of straw and paper, and that we may set free our Christian rods for the chastisement of sin, and expose the craft and deceit of the devil, so that we may amend ourselves by punishment and again obtain God's favour.

(a) THE FIRST WALL

That the Temporal Power has no Jurisdiction over the Spirituality

Let us, in the first place, attack the first wall.

It has been devised that the Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the *spiritual estate*, princes, lords, artificers, and peasants are the *temporal estate*. This is an artful lie and hypocritical device, but let no one be made afraid by it, and that for this reason: that all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office alone. As St. Paul says (1 Cor. xii.), we are all one body, though each member does its own work, to serve the others. This is because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith,

and are all Christians alike; for baptism, Gospel, and faith, these alone make spiritual and Christian people.

As for the unction by a pope or a bishop, tonsure, ordination, consecration, and clothes differing from those of laymen—all this may make a hypocrite or an anointed puppet, but never a Christian or a spiritual man. Thus we are all consecrated as priests by baptism, as St. Peter says: “Ye are a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter ii. 9); and in the book of Revelation: “and hast made us unto our God (by Thy blood) kings and priests” (Rev. v. 10). For, if we had not a higher consecration in us than pope or bishop can give, no priest could ever be made by the consecration of pope or bishop, nor could he say the mass, or preach, or absolve. Therefore the bishop’s consecration is just as if in the name of the whole congregation he took one person out of the community, each member of which has equal power, and commanded him to exercise this power for the rest; in the same way as if ten brothers, co-heirs as king’s sons, were to choose one from among them to rule over their inheritance, they would all of them still remain kings and have equal power, although one is ordered to govern.

And to put the matter even more plainly, if a little company of pious Christian laymen were taken prisoners and carried away to a desert, and had not among them a priest consecrated by a bishop, and were there to agree to elect one of them, born in wedlock or not, and were to order him to baptise, to celebrate the mass, to absolve, and to preach, this man would as truly be a priest, as if all the bishops and all the popes had consecrated him. That is why in cases of necessity every man can baptise and absolve, which would not be possible if we were not all priests. This great grace and virtue of baptism and of the Christian estate they have quite destroyed and made us forget by their ecclesiastical law. In this way the Christians used to choose their bishops and priests out of the community; these being afterwards confirmed by other bishops, without the pomp that now prevails. So was it that St. Augustine, Ambrose, Cyprian, were bishops.

Since, then, the temporal power is baptised as we are, and has the same faith and Gospel, we must allow it to be priest and bishop, and account its office an office that is proper and useful to the Christian community. For whatever issues from baptism may boast that it has been consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although it does not beseem every one to exercise these offices. For, since we are all priests alike, no man may put himself forward or take upon himself, without our consent and election, to do that which we have all alike power to do. For, if a thing is common to all, no man may take it to himself without the wish and command of the community. And if it should happen that a man were appointed to one of these offices and deposed for abuses, he would be just what he was before. Therefore a priest should be nothing in Christendom but a functionary; as long as he holds his office, he has precedence of others; if he is deprived of it, he is a peasant or a citizen like the rest. Therefore a priest is verily no longer a priest after deposition. But now they have invented *characteres indelebiles*’ and pretend that a priest after deprivation still differs from a simple layman. They even imagine that a priest can never be anything but a priest—that is, that he can never become a layman. All this is nothing but mere talk and ordinance of human invention.

It follows, then, that between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, or, as they call it, between spiritual and temporal persons, the only real difference

is one of office and function, and not of estate; for they are all of the same spiritual estate, true priests, bishops, and popes, though their functions are not the same—just as among priests and monks every man has not the same functions. And this, as I said above, St. Paul says (Rom. xii.; 1 Cor. xii.), and St. Peter (1 Peter ii.): “We, being many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.” Christ’s body is not double or twofold, one temporal, the other spiritual. He is one Head, and He has one body.

We see, then, that just as those we call spiritual, or priests, bishops, or popes, do not differ from other Christians in any other or higher degree but in that they are to be concerned with the word of God and the sacraments—that being their work and office—in the same way the temporal authorities hold the sword and the rod in their hands to punish the wicked and to protect the good. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, every man, has the office and function of his calling, and yet all alike are consecrated priests and bishops, and every man should by his office or function be useful and beneficial to the rest, so that various kinds of work may all be united for the furtherance of body and soul, just as the members of the body all serve one another.

Now see what a Christian doctrine is this: that the temporal authority is not above the clergy, and may not punish it. This is as if one were to say the hand may not help, though the eye is in grievous suffering. Is it not unnatural, not to say unchristian, that one member may not help another, or guard it against harm? Nay, the nobler the member, the more the rest are bound to help it. Therefore I say, Forasmuch as the temporal power has been ordained by God for the punishment of the bad and the protection of the good, therefore we must let it do its duty throughout the whole Christian body, without respect of persons, whether it strikes popes, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, or whoever it may be. If it were sufficient reason for fettering the temporal power that it is inferior among the offices of Christianity to the offices of priest or confessor, or to the spiritual estate—if this were so, then we ought to restrain tailors, cobblers, masons, carpenters, cooks, cellarmen, peasants, and all secular workmen, from providing the Pope or bishops, priests and monks, with shoes, clothes, houses or victuals, or from paying them tithes. But if these laymen are allowed to do their work without restraint, what do the Romanist scribes mean by their laws? They mean that they withdraw themselves from the operation of temporal Christian power, simply in order that they may be free to do evil, and thus fulfil what St. Peter said: “There shall be false teachers among you, . . . and in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you” (2 Peter ii. 1, etc.).

Therefore the temporal Christian power must exercise its office without let or hindrance, without considering whom it may strike, whether pope or bishop, or priest: whoever is guilty, let him suffer for it.

Whatever the ecclesiastical law has said in opposition to this is merely the invention of Romanist arrogance. For this is what St. Paul says to all Christians: “Let every soul” (I presume including the popes) “be subject unto the higher powers; for they bear not the sword in vain: they serve the Lord therewith, for vengeance on evildoers and for praise to them that do well” (Rom. xiii. 1-4). Also St. Peter: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, . . . for so is the will of God” (1 Peter ii. 13, 15). He has also foretold that men would come who should despise government (2 Peter ii.), as has come to pass through ecclesiastical law.

Now, I imagine, the first paper wall is overthrown, inasmuch as the temporal power has become a member of the Christian body; although its work relates to the body, yet does it belong to the spiritual estate. Therefore, it must do its duty without let or hindrance upon all members of the whole body, to punish or urge, as guilt may deserve, or need may require, without respect of pope, bishops, or priests, let them threaten or excommunicate as they will. That is why a guilty priest is deprived of his priesthood before being given over to the secular arm; whereas this would not be right, if the secular sword had not authority over him already by Divine ordinance.

It is, indeed, past bearing that the spiritual law should esteem so highly the liberty, life, and property of the clergy, as if laymen were not as good spiritual Christians, or not equally members of the Church. Why should your body, life, goods, and honour be free, and not mine, seeing that we are equal as Christians, and have received alike baptism, faith, spirit, and all things? If a priest is killed, the country is laid under an interdict: why not also if a peasant is killed? Whence comes this great difference among equal Christians? Simply from human laws and inventions.

It can have been no good spirit, either, that devised these evasions and made sin to go unpunished. For if, as Christ and the Apostles bid us, it is our duty to oppose the evil one and all his works and words, and to drive him away as well as may be, how then should we remain quiet and be silent when the Pope and his followers are guilty of devilish works and words? Are we for the sake of men to allow the commandments and the truth of God to be defeated, which at our baptism we vowed to support with body and soul? Truly we should have to answer for all souls that would thus be abandoned and led astray.

Therefore it must have been the arch-devil himself who said, as we read in the ecclesiastical law, If the Pope were so perniciously wicked, as to be dragging souls in crowds to the devil, yet he could not be deposed. This is the accursed and devilish foundation on which they build at Rome, and think that the whole world is to be allowed to go to the devil rather than they should be opposed in the knavery. If a man were to escape punishment simply because he is above the rest, then no Christian might punish another, since Christ has commanded each of us to esteem himself the lowest and humblest (Matt. xviii. 4; Luke ix. 48).

Where there is sin, there remains no avoiding the punishment, as St. Gregory says, We are all equal, but guilt makes one subject to another. Now let us see how they deal with Christendom. They arrogate to themselves immunities without any warrant from the Scriptures, out of their own wickedness, whereas God and the Apostles made them subject to the secular sword; so that we must fear that it is the work of antichrist, or a sign of his near approach.

(b) THE SECOND WALL

That no one may interpret the Scriptures but the Pope

The second wall is even more tottering and weak: that they alone pretend to be considered masters of the Scriptures; although they learn nothing of them all their life. They assume authority, and juggle before us with impudent words, saying that the Pope cannot err in matters of faith, whether he be evil

or good, albeit they cannot prove it by a single letter. This is why the canon law contains so many heretical and unchristian, nay unnatural, laws; but of these we need not speak now. For whereas they imagine the Holy Ghost never leaves them, however unlearned and wicked they may be, they grow bold enough to decree whatever they like. But were this true, where were the need and use of the Holy Scriptures? Let us burn them, and content ourselves with the unlearned gentlemen at Rome, in whom the Holy Ghost dwells, who, however, can dwell in pious souls only. If I had not read it, I could never have believed that the devil should have put forth such follies at Rome and find a following.

But not to fight them with our own words, we will quote the Scriptures. St. Paul says, "If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace" (1 Cor. xiv. 30). What would be the use of this commandment, if we were to believe him alone that teaches or has the highest seat? Christ Himself says, "And they shall be all taught of God." (St. John vi. 45). Thus it may come to pass that the Pope and his followers are wicked and not true Christians, and not being taught by God, have no true understanding, whereas a common man may have true understanding. Why should we then not follow him? Has not the Pope often erred? Who could help Christianity, in case the Pope errs, if we do not rather believe another who has the Scriptures for him?

Therefore it is a wickedly devised fable—and they cannot quote a single letter to confirm it—that it is for the Pope alone to interpret the Scriptures or to confirm the interpretation of them. They have assumed the authority of their own selves. And though they say that this authority was given to St. Peter when the keys were given to him, it is plain enough that the keys were not given to St. Peter alone, but to the whole community. Besides, the keys were not ordained for doctrine or authority, but for sin, to bind or loose; and what they claim besides this from the keys is mere invention. But what Christ said to St. Peter: "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not" (St. Luke xii. 32), cannot relate to the Pope, inasmuch as the greater part of the Popes have been without faith, as they are themselves forced to acknowledge; nor did Christ pray for Peter alone, but for all the Apostles and all Christians, as He says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word" (St. John xvii.). Is not this plain enough?

Only consider the matter. They must needs acknowledge that there are pious Christians among us that have the true faith, spirit, understanding, word, and mind of *Christ*: why then should we reject their word and understanding, and follow a pope who has neither understanding nor spirit? Surely this were to deny our whole faith and the Christian Church. Moreover, if the article of our faith is right, "I believe in the holy Christian Church," the Pope cannot alone be right; else we must say, "I believe in the Pope of Rome," and reduce the Christian Church to one man, which is devilish and damnable heresy. Besides that, we are all priests, as I have said, and have all one faith, one Gospel, one Sacrament; how then should we not have the power of discerning and judging what is right or wrong in matters of faith? What becomes of St. Paul's words, "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man: (1 Cor. ii. 15), and also, "we having the same spirit of faith"? (2 Cor. iv. 13). Why then should we not perceive as well as an unbelieving pope what agrees or disagrees with our faith?

By these and many other texts we should gain courage and freedom, and should not let the spirit of liberty (as St. Paul has it) be frightened away by the inventions of the popes; we should boldly judge what they do and what they leave undone by our own believing understanding of the Scriptures, and force them to follow the better understanding, and not their own. Did not Abraham in old days have to obey his Sarah, who was in stricter bondage to him than we are to any one on earth? Thus, too, Balaam's ass was wiser than the prophet. If God spoke by an ass against a prophet, why should He not speak by a pious man against the Pope? Besides, St. Paul withstood St. Peter as being in error (Gal. ii.). Therefore it behoves every Christian to aid the faith by understanding and defending it and by condemning all errors.

(c) THE THIRD WALL

That no one may call a council but the Pope

The third wall falls of itself, as soon as the first two have fallen; for if the Pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, we are bound to stand by the Scriptures, to punish and to constrain him, according to Christ's commandment, "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" (St. Matt. xviii. 15-17). Here each member is commanded to take care for the other; much more then should we do this, if it is a ruling member of the community that does evil, which by its evil-doing causes great harm and offence to the others. If then I am to accuse him before the Church, I must collect the Church together. Moreover, they can show nothing in the Scriptures giving the Pope sole power to call and confirm councils; they have nothing but their own laws; but these hold good only so long as they are not injurious to Christianity and the laws of God. Therefore, if the Pope deserves punishment, these laws cease to bind us, since Christendom would suffer, if he were not punished by a council. Thus we read (Acts xv.) that the council of the Apostles was not called by St. Peter, but by all the Apostles and the elders. But if the right to call it had lain with St. Peter alone, it would not have been a Christian council, but a heretical *conciliabulum*. Moreover, the most celebrated council of all—that of Nicæa—was neither called nor confirmed by the Bishop of Rome, but by the Emperor Constantine; and after him many other emperors have done the same, and yet the councils called by them were accounted most Christian. But if the Pope alone had the power, they must all have been heretical. Moreover, if I consider the councils that the Pope has called, I do not find that they produced any notable results.

Therefore when need requires, and the Pope is a cause of offence to Christendom, in these cases whoever can best do so, as a faithful member of the whole body, must do what he can to procure a true free council. This no one can do so well as the temporal authorities, especially since they are fellow-Christians, fellow-priests, sharing one spirit and one power in all things, and since they should exercise the office that they have received from God without

hindrance, whenever it is necessary and useful that it should be exercised. Would it not be most unnatural, if a fire were to break out in a city, and every one were to keep still and let it burn on and on, whatever might be burnt, simply because they had not the mayor's authority, or because the fire perchance broke out at the mayor's house? Is not every citizen bound in this case to rouse and call in the rest? How much more should this be done in the spiritual city of Christ, if a fire of offence breaks out, either at the Pope's government or wherever it may! The like happens if an enemy attacks a town. The first to rouse up the rest earns glory and thanks. Why then should not he earn glory that describes the coming of our enemies from hell and rouses and summons all Christians?

But as for their boasts of their authority, that no one must oppose it, this is idle talk. No one in Christendom has any authority to do harm, or to forbid others to prevent harm being done. There is no authority in the Church but for reformation. Therefore if the Pope wished to use his power to prevent the calling of a free council, so as to prevent the reformation of the Church, we must not respect him or his power; and if he should begin to excommunicate and fulminate, we must despise this as the doings of a madman, and, trusting in God, excommunicate and repel him as best we may. For this his usurped power is nothing; he does not possess it, and he is at Once overthrown by a text from the Scriptures. For St. Paul says to the Corinthians "that God has given us authority for edification, and not for destruction" (2 Cor. x. 8). Who will set this text at nought? It is the power of the devil and of antichrist that prevents what would serve for the reformation of Christendom. Therefore we must not follow it, but oppose it with our body, our goods, and all that we have. And even if a miracle were to happen in favour of the Pope against the temporal power, or if some were to be stricken by a plague, as they sometimes boast has happened, all this is to be held as having been done by the devil in order to injure our faith in God, as was foretold by Christ: "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. xxiv. 23); and St. Paul tells the Thessalonians that the coming of antichrist shall be "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thess. ii. 9).

Therefore let us hold fast to this: that Christian power can do nothing against Christ, as St. Paul says, "For we can do nothing against Christ, but for Christ" (2 Cor. xiii. 8). But, if it does anything against Christ, it is the power of antichrist and the devil, even if it rained and hailed wonders and plagues. Wonders and plagues prove nothing, especially in these latter evil days, of which false wonders are foretold in all the Scriptures. Therefore we must hold fast to the words of God with an assured faith; then the devil will soon cease his wonders.

And now I hope the false, lying spectre will be laid with which the Romanists have long terrified and stupefied our consciences. And it will be seen that, like all the rest of us, they are subject to the temporal sword; they have no authority to interpret the Scriptures by force without skill; and that they have no power to prevent a council, or to pledge it in accordance with their pleasure, or to bind it beforehand, and deprive it of its freedom; and that if they do this, they are verily of the fellowship of antichrist and the devil, and have nothing of Christ but the name.

OF THE MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE COUNCILS

Let us now consider the matters which should be treated in the councils, and with which popes, cardinals, bishops, and all learned men should occupy themselves day and night, if they love Christ and His Church. But if they do not do so, the people at large and the temporal powers must do so, without considering the thunders of their excommunications. For an unjust excommunication is better than ten just absolutions, and an unjust absolution is worse than ten just excommunications. Therefore let us rouse ourselves, fellow-Germans, and fear God more than man, that we be not answerable for all the poor souls that are so miserably lost through the wicked, devilish government of the Romanists, and that the dominion of the devil should not grow day by day, if indeed this hellish government can grow any worse, which, for my part, I can neither conceive nor believe.

1. It is a distressing and terrible thing to see that the head of Christendom, who boasts of being the vicar of Christ and the successor of St. Peter, lives in a worldly pomp that no king or emperor can equal, so that in him that calls himself most holy and most spiritual there is more worldliness than in the world itself. He wears a triple crown, whereas the mightiest kings only wear one crown. If this resembles the poverty of Christ and St. Peter, it is a new sort of resemblance. They prate of its being heretical to object to this; nay, they will not even hear how unchristian and ungodly it is. But I think that if he should have to pray to God with tears, he would have to lay down his crowns; for God will not endure any arrogance. His office should be nothing else than to weep and pray constantly for Christendom and to be an example of all humility.

However this may be, this pomp is a stumbling-block, and the Pope, for the very salvation of his soul, ought to put it off, for St. Paul says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. v. 21), and again, "Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (2 Cor. viii. 21). A simple mitre would be enough for the pope: wisdom and sanctity should raise him above the rest; the crown of pride he should leave to antichrist, as his predecessors did some hundreds of years ago. They say, He is the ruler of the world. This is false; for Christ, whose vicegerent and vicar he claims to be, said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John xviii. 36). But no vicegerent can have a wider dominion than his Lord, nor is he a vicegerent of Christ in His glory, but of Christ crucified, as St. Paul says, "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (2 Cor. ii. 2), and "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant" (Phil. ii. 5,7). Again, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. i.). Now they make the Pope a vicegerent of Christ exalted in heaven, and some have let the devil rule them so thoroughly that they have maintained that the Pope is above the angels in heaven and has power over them, which is precisely the true work of the true antichrist.

2. What is the use in Christendom of the people called "cardinals"? I will tell you. In Italy and Germany there are many rich convents, endowments, fiefs, and benefices, and as the best way of getting these into the hands of Rome, they created cardinals, and gave them the sees, convents, and prelacies,

and thus destroyed the service of God. That is why Italy is almost a desert now: the convents are destroyed, the sees consumed, the revenues of the prelates and of all the churches drawn to Rome; towns are decayed, the country and the people ruined, because there is no more any worship of God or preaching; why? Because the cardinals must have all the wealth. No Turk could have thus desolated Italy and overthrown the worship of God.

Now that Italy is sucked dry, they come to Germany and begin very quietly; but if we look on quietly Germany will soon be brought into the same state as Italy. We have a few cardinals already. What the Romanists mean thereby the drunken Germans are not to see until they have lost everything—bishoprics, convents, benefices, fiefs, even to their last farthing. Antichrist must take the riches of the earth, as it is written (Dan. xi. 8, 39, 43). They begin by taking off the cream of the bishoprics, convents and fiefs; and as they do not dare to destroy everything as they have done in Italy, they employ such holy cunning to join together ten or twenty prelates, and take such a portion of each annually that the total amounts to a considerable sum. The prior of Würzburg gives one thousand guilders; those of Bamberg, Mayence, Treves, and others also contribute. In this way they collect one thousand or ten thousand guilders, in order that a cardinal may live at Rome in a state like that of a wealthy monarch.

After we have gained this, we will create thirty or forty cardinals on one day, and give one St. Michael's Mount, near Bamberg, and likewise the see of Würzburg, to which belong some rich benefices, until the churches and the cities are desolated; and then we shall say, We are the vicars of Christ, the shepherds of Christ's flocks; those mad, drunken Germans must submit to it. I advise, however, that there be made fewer cardinals, or that the Pope should have to support them out of his own purse. It would be amply sufficient if there were twelve, and if each of them had an annual income of one thousand guilders.

What has brought us Germans to such a pass that we have to suffer this robbery and this destruction of our property by the Pope? If the kingdom of France has resisted it, why do we Germans suffer ourselves to be fooled and deceived? It would be more endurable if they did nothing but rob us of our property; but they destroy the Church and deprive Christ's flock of their good shepherds, and overthrow the service and word of God. Even if there were no cardinals at all, the Church would not perish, for they do nothing for the good of Christendom; all they do is to traffic in and quarrel about prelates and bishoprics, which any robber could do as well.

3. If we took away ninety-nine parts of the Pope's Court and only left one hundredth, it would still be large enough to answer questions on matters of belief. Now there is such a swarm of vermin at Rome, all called papal, that Babylon itself never saw the like. There are more than three thousand papal secretaries alone; but who shall count the other office-bearers, since there are so many offices that we can scarcely count them, and all waiting for German benefices, as wolves wait for a flock of sheep? I think Germany now pays more to the Pope than it formerly paid the emperors; nay, some think more than three hundred thousand guilders are sent from Germany to Rome every year, for nothing whatsoever; and in return we are scoffed at and put to shame. Do we still wonder why princes, noblemen, cities, foundations, convents, and people grow poor? We should rather wonder that we have anything left to eat.

Now that we have got well into our game, let us pause a while and show that the Germans are not such fools as not to perceive or understand this Romish trickery. I do not here complain that God's commandments and Christian justice are despised at Rome; for the state of things in Christendom, especially at Rome, is too bad for us to complain of such high matters. Nor do I even complain that no account is taken of natural or secular justice and reason. The mischief lies still deeper. I complain that they do not observe their own fabricated canon law, though this is in itself rather mere tyranny, avarice, and worldly pomp, than a law. This we shall now show.

Long ago the emperors and princes of Germany allowed the Pope to claim the *annates* from all German benefices; that is, half of the first year's income from every benefice. The object of this concession was that the Pope should collect a fund with all this money to fight against the Turks and infidels, and to protect Christendom, so that the nobility should not have to bear the burden of the struggle alone, and that the priests should also contribute. The popes have made such use of this good simple piety of the Germans that they have taken this money for more than one hundred years, and have now made of it a regular tax and duty; and not only have they accumulated nothing, but they have founded out of it many posts and offices at Rome, which are paid by it yearly, as out of a ground-rent.

Whenever there is any pretence of fighting the Turks, they send out some commission for collecting money, and often send out indulgences under the same pretext of fighting the Turks. They think we Germans will always remain such great and inveterate fools that we will go on giving money to satisfy their unspeakable greed, though we see plainly that neither *annates*, nor absolution money, nor any other—not one farthing—goes against the Turks, but all goes into the bottomless sack. They lie and deceive, form and make covenants with us, of which they do not mean to keep one jot. And all this is done in the holy name of Christ and St. Peter.

This being so, the German nation, the bishops and princes, should remember that they are Christians, and should defend the people, who are committed to their government and protection in temporal and spiritual affairs, from these ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing that profess to be shepherds and rulers; and since the *annates* are so shamefully abused, and the covenants concerning them not carried out, they should not suffer their lands and people to be so piteously and unrighteously flayed and ruined; but by an imperial or a national law they should either retain the *annates* in the country, or abolish them altogether. For since they do not keep to the covenants, they have no right to the *annates*; therefore bishops and princes are bound to punish this thievery and robbery, or prevent it, as justice demands. And herein should they assist and strengthen the Pope, who is perchance too weak to prevent this scandal by himself, or, if he wishes to protect or support it, restrain and oppose him as a wolf and tyrant; for he has no authority to do evil or to protect evil-doers. Even if it were proposed to collect any such treasure for the use against the Turks, we should be wise in future, and remember that the German nation is more fitted to take charge of it than the Pope, seeing that the German nation by itself is able to provide men enough, if the money is forthcoming. This matter of the *annates* is like many other Romish pretexts.

Moreover, the year has been divided among the Pope and the ruling bishops and foundations in such wise that the Pope has taken every other month—

six in all—to give away the benefices that fall in his month; in this way almost all the benefices are drawn into the hands of Rome, and especially the best livings and dignities. And those that once fall into the hands of Rome never come out again, even if they never again fall vacant in the Pope's month. In this way the foundations come very short of their rights, and it is a downright robbery, the object of which is not to give up anything again. Therefore it is now high time to abolish the Pope's months and to take back again all that has thereby fallen into the hands of Rome. For all the princes and nobles should insist that the stolen property shall be returned, the thieves punished, and that those who abuse their powers shall be deprived of them. If the Pope can make a law on the day after his election by which he takes our benefices and livings to which he has no right, the Emperor Charles should so much the more have a right to issue a law for all Germany on the day after his coronation that in future no livings and benefices are to fall to Rome by virtue of the Pope's month, but that those that have so fallen are to be freed and taken from the Romish robbers. This right he possesses authoritatively by virtue of his temporal sword.

But the see of avarice and robbery at Rome is unwilling to wait for the benefices to fall in one after another by means of the Pope's month; and in order to get them into its insatiable maw as speedily as possible, they have devised the plan of taking livings and benefices in three other ways:—

First, if the incumbent of a free living dies at Rome or on his way thither, his living remains for ever the property of the see of Rome, or I rather should say, the see of robbers, though they will not let us call them robbers, although no one has ever heard or read of such robbery.

Secondly, if a "servant" of the Pope or of one of the cardinals takes a living, or if, having a living, he becomes a "servant" of the Pope or of a cardinal, the living remains with Rome. But who can count the "servants" of the Pope and his cardinals, seeing that if he goes out riding, he is attended by three or four thousand mule-riders, more than any king or emperor? For Christ and St. Peter go on foot, in order that their vicegerents might indulge the better in all manner of pomp. Besides, their avarice has devised and invented this: that in foreign countries also there are many called "papal servants," as at Rome; so that in all parts this single crafty little word "papal servant" brings all benefices to the chair at Rome, and they are kept there for ever. Are not these mischievous, devilish devices? Let us only wait a while, Mayence, Magdeburg, and Halberstadt will fall very nicely to Rome, and we shall have to pay dearly for our cardinal. Hereafter all the German bishops will be made cardinals, so that there shall remain nothing to ourselves.

Thirdly, whenever there is any dispute about a benefice; and this is, I think, well-nigh the broadest and commonest road by which benefices are brought to Rome. For where there is no dispute numberless knaves can be found at Rome who are ready to scrape up disputes, and attack livings wherever they like. In this way many a good priest loses his living, or has to buy off the dispute for a time with a sum of money. These benefices, confiscated by right or wrong of dispute, are to be for ever the property of the see of Rome. It would be no wonder, if God were to rain sulphur and fire from heaven and cast Rome down into the pit, as He did formerly to Sodom and Gomorrah. What is the use of a pope in Christendom, if the only use made of his power is to commit these supreme villainies under his protection and assis-

tance? Oh noble princes and sirs, how long will you suffer your lands and your people to be the prey of these ravening wolves?

But these tricks did not suffice, and bishoprics were too slow in falling into the power of Roman avarice. Accordingly our good friend Avarice made the discovery that all bishoprics are abroad in name only, but that their land and soil is at Rome; from this it follows that no bishop may be confirmed until he has bought the “Pall” for a large sum, and has with a terrible oath bound himself a servant of the Pope. That is why no bishop dare oppose the Pope. This was the object of the oath, and this is how the wealthiest bishoprics have come to debt and ruin. Mayence, I am told, pays twenty thousand guilders. These are true Roman tricks, it seems to me. It is true that they once decreed in the canon law that the *Pall* should be given free, the number of the Pope’s servants diminished, disputes made less frequent, that foundations and bishops should enjoy their liberty; but all this brought them no money. They have therefore reversed all this: bishops and foundations have lost all their power; they are mere ciphers, without office, authority, or function; all things are regulated by the chief knaves at Rome, even the offices of sextons and bell-ringers in all churches. All disputes are transferred to Rome; each one does what he will, strong through the Pope’s power is.

What has happened in this very year? The Bishop of Strasburg, wishing to regulate his see in a proper way and reform it in the matter of Divine service, published some Divine and Christian ordinances for that purpose. But our worthy Pope and the holy chair at Rome overturn altogether this holy and spiritual order on the requisition of the priests. This is what they call being the shepherd of Christ’s sheep—supporting priests against their own bishops and protecting their disobedience by Divine decrees. Antichrist, I hope, will not insult God in this open way. There you have the Pope, as you have chosen to have him; and why? Why, because if the Church were to be reformed, there would be danger that it would spread further, so that it might also reach Rome. Therefore it is better to prevent priests from being at one with each other; they should rather, as they have done hitherto, sow discord among kings and princes, and flood the world with Christian blood, lest Christian unity should trouble the holy Roman see with reforms.

So far we have seen what they do with the livings that fall vacant. Now there are not enough vacancies for this delicate greed; therefore it has also taken prudent account of the benefices that are still held by their incumbents, so that they may become vacant, though they are in fact not vacant, and this they effect in many ways.

First, they lie in wait for fat livings or sees which are held by an old or sick man, or even by one afflicted by an imaginary incompetence; him the Roman see gives a *coadjutor*, that is an assistant without his asking or wishing it, for the benefit of the *coadjutor*, because he is a papal servant, or pays for the office, or has otherwise earned it by some menial service rendered to Rome. Thus there is an end of free election on the part of the chapter, or of the right of him who had presented to the living; and all goes to Rome.

Secondly, there is a little word: *commendam*, that is, when the Pope gives a rich and fat convent or church into the charge of a cardinal or any other of his servants, just as I might command you to take charge of one hundred guilders for me. In this way the convent is neither given, nor lent, nor destroyed, nor is its Divine service abolished, but only entrusted to a man’s

charge, not, however, for him to protect and improve it, but to drive out the one he finds there, to take the property and revenue, and to install some apostate runaway monk, who is paid five or six guilders a year, and sits in the church all day and sells symbols and pictures to the pilgrims; so that neither chanting or reading in the church goes on there any more. Now if we were to call this the destruction of convents and abolition of Divine service we should be obliged to accuse the Pope of destroying Christianity and abolishing Divine service—for truly he is doing this effectually—but this would be thought harsh language at Rome; therefore it is called a *commendam*, or an order to take charge of the convent. In this way the Pope can make commendams of four or more convents a year, any one of which produces a revenue of more than six thousand guilders. This is the way Divine service is advanced and convents kept up at Rome. This will be introduced into Germany as well.

Thirdly, there are certain benefices that are said to be *incompatible*; that is, they may not be held together according to the canon law, such as two cures, two sees, and the like. Now the Holy See and avarice twists itself out of the canon law by making “glosses,” or interpretations, called *Unio, or Incorporatio*; that is, several incompatible benefices are incorporated, so that one is a member of the other, and the whole is held to be one benefice: then they are no longer incompatible, and we have got rid of the holy canon law, so that it is no longer binding, except on those who do not buy those *glosses* of the Pope and his *Datarius*. *Unio* is the same kind: a number of benefices are tied together like a bundle of faggots, and on account of this coupling together they are held to be one benefice. Thus there may be found many a “courting” at Rome who alone holds twenty-two cures, seven priories, and forty-four prebends, all which is done in virtue of this masterly *gloss*, so as not to be contrary to law. Any one can imagine what cardinals and other prelates may hold. In this way the Germans are to have their purses emptied and their conceit taken out of them.

There is another *gloss* called *Administratio*; that is, that besides his see a man holds an abbey or other high benefice, and possesses all the property of it, without any other title but *administrator*. For at Rome it is enough that words should change, and not deeds, just as if I said, a procuress was to be called a mayoress, yet may remain as good as she is now. Such Romish rule was foretold by St. Peter, when he said, “There shall be false teachers among you, ... and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you” (2 Peter ii. 1, 3).

This precious Roman avarice has also invented the practice of selling and lending prebends and benefices on condition that the seller or lender has the reversion, so that if the incumbent dies, the benefice falls to him that has sold it, lent it, or abandoned it; in this way they have made benefices heritable property, so that none can come to hold them unless the seller sells them to him, or leaves them to him at his death. Then there are many that give a benefice to another in name only, and on condition that he shall not receive a farthing. It is now, too, an old practice for a man to give another a benefice and to receive a certain annual sum, which proceeding was formerly called simony. And there are many other such little things which I cannot recount; and so they deal worse with the benefices than the heathens by the cross dealt with Christ’s clothes.

But all this that I have spoke of is old and common at Rome. Their avarice has invented another device, which I hope will be the last and choke it. The Pope has made a noble discovery, called *Pectoralis Reservatio*, that is, “mental reservation”—*et proprius motus*, that is, “and his own will and power.” The matter is managed in this way: Suppose a man obtains a benefice at Rome, which is confirmed to him in due form; then comes another, who brings money, or who has done some other service of which the less said the better, and requests the Pope to give him the same benefice: then the Pope will take it from the first and give it him. If you say, that is wrong, the Most Holy Father must then excuse himself, that he may not be openly blamed for having violated justice; and he says “that in his heart and mind he reserved his authority over the said benefice,” whilst he never had heard or thought of the same in all his life. Thus he has devised a *gloss* which allows him in his proper person to lie and cheat and fool us all, and all this impudently and in open daylight, and nevertheless he claims to be the head of Christendom, letting the evil spirit rule him with manifest lies.

This wantonness and lying reservation of the popes has brought about an unutterable state of things at Rome. There is a buying and a selling, a changing, blustering and bargaining, cheating and lying, robbing and stealing, debauchery and villainy, and all kinds of contempt of God, that antichrist himself could not rule worse. Venice, Antwerp, Cairo, are nothing to this fair and market at Rome, except that there things are done with some reason and justice, whilst here things are done as the devil himself could wish. And out of this ocean a like virtue overflows all the world. Is it not natural that such people should dread a reformation and a free council, and should rather embroil all kings and princes, than that their unity should bring about a council? Who would like his villainy to be exposed?

Finally, the Pope has built a special house for this fine traffic—that is, the house of the *Datarius* at Rome. Thither all must come that bargain in this way, for prebends and benefices; from him they must buy the *glosses* and obtain the right to practise such sublime villainy. In former days it was fairly well at Rome, when justice had to be bought, or could only be put down by money; but now she has become so fastidious that she does not allow any one to commit villainies unless he has first bought the right to do it with great sums. If this is not a house of prostitution, worse than all houses of prostitution that can be conceived, I do not know what houses of prostitution really are.

If you bring money to this house, you can arrive at all that I have mentioned; and more than this, any sort of usury is made legitimate for money; property got by theft or robbery is here made legal. Here vows are annulled; here a monk obtains leave to quit his order; here priests can enter married life for money; here bastards can become legitimate; and dishonour and shame may arrive at high honours; all evil repute and disgrace is knighted and ennobled; here a marriage is suffered that is in a forbidden degree, or has some other defect. Oh, what a trafficking and plundering is there! one would think that the canon laws were only so many money-snares, from which he must free himself who would become a Christian man. Nay, here the devil becomes a saint, and a god besides. What heaven and earth might not do may be done by this house. Their ordinances are called compositions—*compositions*, forsooth! confusions rather. Oh, what a poor treasury is the toll on the Rhine compared with this holy house!

Let no one think that I say too much. It is all notorious, so that even at Rome they are forced to own that it is more terrible and worse than one can say. I have said and will say nothing of the internal dregs of private vices. I only speak of well-known public matters, and yet my words do not suffice. Bishops, priests, and especially the doctors of the universities, who are paid to do it, ought to have unanimously written and exclaimed against it. Yea, if you will turn the leaf you will discover the truth.

I have still to give a farewell greeting. These treasures, that would have satisfied three mighty kings, were not enough for this unspeakable greed, and so they have made over and sold their traffic to Fugger at Augsburg, so that the lending and buying and selling sees and benefices, and all this traffic in ecclesiastical property, has in the end come into the right hands, and spiritual and temporal matters have now become one business. Now I should like to know that the most cunning would devise for Romish greed to do that it has not done, except that Fugger might sell or pledge his two trades, that have now become one. I think they must have come to the end of their devices. For what they have stolen and yet steal in all countries by bulls of indulgences, letters of confession, letters of dispensation and other *confessionalia*, all this I think mere bungling work, and much like playing toss with a devil in hell. Not that they produce little, for a mighty king could support himself by them; but they are as nothing compared to the other streams of revenue mentioned above. I will not now consider what has become of that indulgence money; I shall inquire into this another time, for *Campofiore* and *Belvedere* and some other places probably know something about it.

Meanwhile, since this devilish state of things is not only an open robbery, deceit, and tyranny of the gates of hell, but also destroys Christianity body and soul, we are bound to use all our diligence to prevent this misery and destruction of Christendom. If we wish to fight the Turk, let us begin here, where they are worst. If we justly hang thieves and behead robbers, why do we leave the greed of Rome so unpunished, that is the greatest thief and robber that has appeared or can appear on earth, and does all this in the holy name of Christ and St. Peter? Who can suffer this and be silent about it? Almost everything that they possess has been stolen or got by robbery, as we learn from all histories. Why, the Pope never bought those great possessions, so as to be able to raise well-nigh ten hundred thousand ducats from his ecclesiastical offices, without counting his gold mines described above and his land. He did not inherit it from Christ and St. Peter; no one gave it or lent it him; he has not acquired it by prescription. Tell me, where can he have got it? You can learn from this what their object is when they send out legates to collect money to be used against the Turk.

TWENTY-SEVEN ARTICLES RESPECTING THE REFORMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN ESTATE

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

1. Princes, nobles, and cities should promptly forbid their subjects to pay the *annates* to Rome and should even abolish them altogether. For the Pope

has broken the compact, and turned the *annates* into robbery for the harm and shame of the German nation; he gives them to his friends; he sells them for large sums of money and founds benefices on them. Therefore he has forfeited his right to them, and deserves punishment. In this way the temporal power should protect the innocent and prevent wrongdoing, as we are taught by St. Paul (Rom. xiii.) and by St. Peter (1 Peter ii.) and even by the canon law (16. q. 7. de Filiis). That is why we say to the Pope and his followers, *Tu ora!* “Thou shalt pray”; to the Emperor and his followers, *Tu protege!* “Thou shalt protect”; to the commons, *Tu labora!* “Thou shalt work.” Not that each man should not pray, protect, and work; for if a man fulfils his duty, that is prayer, protection, and work; but every man must have his proper task.

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

3. It should be decreed by an imperial law that no episcopal cloak and no confirmation of any appointment shall for the future be obtained from Rome. The order of the most holy and renowned Nicean Council must again be restored, namely, that a bishop must be confirmed by the two nearest bishops or by the archbishop. If the Pope cancels the decrees of these and all other councils, what is the good of the councils at all? Who has given him the right thus to despise councils and to cancel them? If this is allowed, we had better abolish all bishops, archbishops and primates, and make simple rectors of all of them, so that they would have the Pope alone over them as is indeed the case now; he deprives bishops, archbishops, and primates of all the authority of their office, taking everything to himself, and leaving them only the name and the empty title; more than this, by his exemption he has withdrawn convents,

abbots, and prelates from the ordinary authority of the bishops, so that there remains no order in Christendom. The necessary result of this must be, and has been, laxity in punishing and such a liberty to do evil in all the world that I very much fear one might call the Pope “the man of sin” (2 Thess. ii. 3). Who but the Pope is to blame for this absence of all order, of all punishment, of all government, of all discipline, in Christendom? By his own arbitrary power he ties the hands of all his prelates, and takes from them their rods, while all their subjects have their hands unloosed, and obtain licence by gift or purchase.

But, that he have no cause for complaint, as being deprived of his authority, it should be decreed that in cases where the primates and archbishops are unable to settle the matter, or where there is a dispute among them, the matters shall then be submitted to the Pope, but not every little matter, as was done formerly, and was ordered by the most renowned Nicene Council. His Holiness must not be troubled with small matters, that can be settled without his help; so that he may have leisure to devote himself to his prayers and study and to his care of all Christendom, as he professes to do, as indeed the Apostles did, saying, “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.. .But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts vi. 2, 4). But now we see at Rome nothing but contempt of the Gospel and of prayer, and the service of tables, that is the service of the goods of this world, and the government of the Pope agrees with the government of the Apostles as well as Lucifer with Christ, hell with heaven, night with day; and yet he calls himself Christ’s vicar and the successor of the Apostles.

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

Still we might allow matters respecting benefices or prebends to be treated before bishops, archbishops, and primates. Therefore when it is necessary to decide quarrels and strifes, let the Primate of Germany hold a general consistory, with assessors and chancellors, who would have the control over the *signaturas gratiæ and justitiæ* and to whom matters arising in Germany might be

submitted by appeal. The officers of such court should be paid out of the *annates*, or in some other way, and should not have to draw their salaries, as at Rome, from chance presents and offerings, whereby they grow accustomed to sell justice and injustice, as they must needs do at Rome, where the Pope gives them no salary, but allows them to fatten themselves on presents; for at Rome no one heeds what is right or what is wrong, but only what is money and what is not money. They might be paid out of the *annates*, or by some other means devised by men of higher understanding and of more experience in these things than I have. I am content with making these suggestions and giving some materials for consideration to those who may be able and willing to help the German nation to become a free people of Christians, after this wretched, heathen, unchristian misrule of the Pope.

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

6. The cases reserved (*casus reservati*) should be abolished, by which not only are the people cheated out of much money, but besides many poor consciences are confused and led into error by the ruthless tyrants, to the intolerable harm of their faith in God, especially those foolish and childish cases that are made important by the bull *In Coena Domini*, and which do not deserve the name of daily sins, not to mention those great cases for which the Pope gives no absolution, such as preventing a pilgrim from going to Rome, furnishing the Turks with arms, or forging the Pope's letters. They only fool us with these gross, mad, and clumsy matters: Sodom and Gomorrah, and all sins that are committed and that can be committed against God's commandments, are not reserved cases; but what God never commanded and they themselves have invented—these must be made reserved cases, solely in order that none may be prevented from bringing money to Rome, that they may live in their lust without fear of the Turk, and may keep the world in their bondage by their wicked useless bulls and briefs.

Now all priests ought to know, or rather it should be a public ordinance, that no secret sin constitutes a reserved case, if there be no public accusation; and that every priest has power to absolve from all sin, whatever its name, if it be secret, and that no abbot, bishop, or pope has power to reserve any such case; and, lastly, that if they do this, it is null and void, and they should, more-

over, be punished as interfering without authority in God's judgment and confusing and troubling without cause our poor witless consciences. But in respect to any great open sin, directly contrary to God's commandments, there is some reason for a "reserved case"; but there should not be too many, nor should they be reserved arbitrarily without due cause. For God has not ordained tyrants, but shepherds, in His Church, as St. Peter says (7 Peter v. 2).

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

8. The terrible oaths must be abolished which bishops are forced, without any right, to swear to the Pope, by which they are bound like servants, and which are arbitrarily and foolishly decreed in the absurd and shallow chapter *Significasti*. Is it not enough that they oppress us in goods, body, and soul by all their mad laws, by which they have weakened faith and destroyed Christianity; but must they now take possession of the very persons of bishops, with their offices and functions, and also claim the *investiture* which used formerly to be the right of the German emperors, and is still the right of the King of France and other kingdoms? This matter caused many wars and disputes with the emperors until the popes impudently took the power by force, since which time they have retained it, just as if it were only right for the Germans, above all Christians on earth, to be the fools of the Pope and the Holy See, and to do and suffer what no one beside would suffer or do. Seeing then that this is mere arbitrary power, robbery, and a hindrance to the exercise of the bishop's ordinary power, and to the injury of poor souls, therefore it is the duty of the Emperor and his nobles to prevent and punish this tyranny.

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

All these excessive, over-presumptuous, and most wicked claims of the Pope are the invention of the devil, with the object of bringing in antichrist in

due course and of raising the Pope above God, as indeed many have done and are now doing. It is not meet that the Pope should exalt himself above temporal authority, except in spiritual matters, such as preaching and absolution; in other matters he should be subject to it, according to the teaching of St. Paul (Rom. xiii.) and St. Peter (1 Peter iii.), as I have said above. He is not the vicar of Christ in heaven, but only of Christ upon earth. For Christ in heaven, in the form of a ruler, requires no vicar, but there sits, sees, does, knows, and commands all things. But He requires him “in the form of a servant” to represent Him as He walked upon earth, working, preaching, suffering, and dying. But they reverse this: they take from Christ His power as heavenly Ruler, and give it to the Pope, and allow “the form of a servant” to be entirely forgotten (Phil. ii. 7). He should properly be called the counter Christ, whom the Scriptures call *antichrist*; for his whole existence, work, and proceedings are directed against Christ, to ruin and destroy the existence and will of Christ.

It is also absurd and puerile for the Pope to boast for such blind, foolish reasons, in his decretal *Pastoralis*, that he is the rightful heir to the empire, if the throne be vacant. Who gave it to him? Did Christ do so when He said, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, but ye shall not do so” (Luke xxii. 25, 26)? Did St. Peter bequeath it to him? It disgusts me that we have to read and teach such impudent, clumsy, foolish lies in the canon law, and, moreover, to take them for Christian doctrine, while in reality they are mere devilish lies. Of this kind also is the unheard-of lie touching the “donation of Constantine.” It must have been a plague sent by God that induced so many wise people to accept such lies, though they are so gross and clumsy that one would think a drunken boor could lie more skilfully. How could preaching, prayer, study, and the care of the poor consist with the government of the empire? These are the true offices of the Pope, which Christ imposed with such insistence that He forbade them to take either a coat or scrip (Matt. x. 10), for he that has to govern a single house can hardly perform these duties. Yet the Pope wishes to rule an empire and to remain a pope. This is the invention of the knaves that would fain become lords of the world in the Pope’s name, and set up again the old Roman empire, as it was formerly, by means of the Pope and name of Christ, in its former condition.

10. The Pope must withdraw his hand from the dish, and on no pretence assume royal authority over Naples and Sicily. He has no more right to them than I, and yet claims to be the lord—their liege lord. They have been taken by force and robbery, like almost all his other possessions. Therefore the Emperor should grant him no such fief, nor any longer allow him those he has, but direct him instead to his Bibles and Prayer-books, so that he may leave the government of countries and peoples to the temporal power, especially of those that no one has given him. Let him rather preach and pray! The same should be done with Bologna, Imola, Vicenza, Ravenna, and whatever the Pope has taken by force and holds without right in the Ancontine territory, in the Romagna, and other parts of Italy, interfering in their affairs against all the commandments of Christ and St. Paul. For St. Paul says “that he that would be one of the soldiers of heaven must not entangle himself in the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. ii. 4). Now the Pope should be the head and the leader of the soldiers of heaven, and yet he engages more in worldly matters than any king or emperor. He should be relieved of his worldly cares and allowed to attend to his duties as a soldier of heaven. Christ also, whose vicar he claims to be, would

have nothing to do with the things of the world., and even asked one that desired of Him a judgment concerning his brother, “Who made Me a judge over you?” (St. Luke xii. 14). But the Pope interferes in these matters unasked, and concerns himself with all matters, as though he were a god, until he himself has forgotten what this Christ is whose vicar he professes to be.

11. The custom of kissing the Pope’s feet must cease. It is an unchristian, or rather an anti-Christian, example that a poor sinful man should suffer his feet to be kissed by one who is a hundred times better than he. If it is done in honour of his power, why does he not do it to others in honour of their holiness? Compare them together: Christ and the Pope. Christ washed His disciples’ feet and dried them, and the disciples never washed His. The Pope, pretending to be higher than Christ, inverts this, and considers it a great favour to let us kiss his feet; whereas, if any one wished to do so, he ought to do his utmost to prevent him, as St. Paul and Barnabas would not suffer themselves to be worshipped as gods by the men at Lystra, saying, “We also are men of like passions with you” (Acts xiv. 14 *seq.*). But our flatterers have brought things to such a pitch that they have set up an idol for us, until no one regards God with such fear or honours Him with such marks of reverence as he does the Pope. This they can suffer, but not that the Pope’s glory should be diminished a single hair’s-breadth. Now if they were Christians and preferred God’s honour to their own, the Pope would never be pleased to have God’s honour despised and his own exalted, nor would he allow any to honour him until he found that God’s honour was again exalted above his own.

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

For what Christian heart can be pleased at seeing the Pope when he communicates, sit still like a gracious lord and have the Sacrament handed to him on a golden reed by a cardinal bending on his knees before him? Just as if the Holy Sacrament were not worthy that a pope, a poor miserable sinner, should stand to do honour to his God, although all other Christians, who are much more holy than the Most Holy Father, receive it with all reverence! Could we be surprised if God visited us all with a plague for that we suffer such dishonour to be done to God by our prelates, and approve it, becoming partners of the Pope’s damnable pride by our silence or flattery? It is the same when he carries the Sacrament in procession. He must be carried, but the Sacrament stands before him like a cup of wine on a table. In short, at Rome Christ is nothing, the Pope is everything; yet they urge us and threaten us, to make us suffer and approve and honour this anti-Christian scandal, contrary to God and all Christian doctrine. Now may God so help a free council that it may teach the Pope that he too is a man, not above God, as he makes himself out to be.

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

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

That this false, misleading belief on the part of simple Christians may be destroyed, and a true opinion of good works may again be introduced, all pilgrimages should be done away with. For there is no good in them, no commandment, but countless causes of sin and of contempt of God's commandments. These pilgrimages are the reason for there being so many beggars, who commit numberless villainies, learn to beg without need and get accustomed to it. Hence arises a vagabond life, besides other miseries which I cannot dwell on now. If any one wishes to go on a pilgrimage or to make a vow for a pilgrimage, he should first inform his priest or the temporal authorities of the reason, and if it should turn out that he wishes to do it for the sake of good works, let this vow and work be just trampled upon by the priest or the temporal authority as an infernal delusion, and let them tell him to spend his money and the labour a pilgrimage would cost on God's commandments and on a thousand fold better work, namely, on his family and his poor neighbours. But if he does it out of curiosity, to see cities and countries, he may be allowed to do so. If he have vowed it in sickness, let such vows be prohibited, and let God's commandments be insisted upon in contrast to them; so that a man may be content with what he vowed in baptism, namely, to keep God's commandments. Yet for this once he may be suffered, for a quiet conscience' sake, to

keep his silly vow. No one is content to walk on the broad highroad of God's commandments; every one makes for himself new roads and new vows, as if he had kept all God's commandments.

13. Now we come to the great crowd that promises much and performs little. Be not angry, my good sirs; I mean well. I have to tell you this bitter and sweet truth: Let no more mendicant monasteries be built! God help us! there are too many as it is. Would to God they were all abolished, or at least made over to two or three orders! It has never done good, it will never do good, to go wandering about over the country. Therefore my advice is that ten, or as many as may be required, be put together and made into one, which one, sufficiently provided for, need not beg. Oh! it is of much more importance to consider what is necessary for the salvation of the common people, than what St. Francis, or St. Dominic, or St. Augustine, or any other man, laid down, especially since things have not turned out as they expected. They should also be relieved from preaching and confession, unless specially required to do so by bishops, priests, the congregation, or another authority. For their preaching and confession has led to nought but mere hatred and envy between priests and monks, to the great offence and hindrance of the people, so that it well deserves to be put a stop to, since its place may very well be dispensed with. It does not look at all improbable that the Holy Roman See had its own reasons for encouraging all this crowd of monks: the Pope perhaps feared that priests and bishops, growing weary of his tyranny, might become too strong for him, and begin a reformation unendurable to his Holiness.

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

Now, in our own time all the prelates are dead that had faith and founded orders, just as it was in old days with the children of Israel: when their fathers were dead, that had seen God's works and miracles, their children, out of ignorance of God's work and of faith, soon began to set up idolatry and their own human works. In the same way, alas! these orders, not understanding God's works and faith, grievously labour and torment themselves by their own laws and practices, and yet never arrive at a true understanding of a spiritual and good life, as was foretold by the Apostle, saying of them, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, . . . ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge" of what a true spiritual life is (2 Tim. iii. 2-7). Better to have no convents which are governed by a spiritual prelate, having no un-

derstanding of Christian faith to govern them; for such a prelate cannot but rule with injury and harm, and the greater the apparent holiness of his life in external works, the greater the harm.

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

I dare say that this my counsel will be thought very foolish, but I care not for this. I advise what I think best, reject it who will. I know how these vows are kept, especially that of chastity, which is so general in all these convents, and yet was not ordered by Christ, and it is given to comparatively few to be able to keep it, as He says, and St. Paul also (Col. ii. 20). I wish all to be helped, and that Christian souls should not be held in bondage, through customs and laws invented by men.

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

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

ducing spirits,forbidding to marry,” etc. (1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, *seq.*). This has been the cause of so much misery that it cannot be told, and has given occasion to the Greek Church to separate from us, and has caused infinite disunion, sin, shame, and scandal, like everything that the devil does or suggests. Now what are we to do?

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

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

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

children of Israel did who stole from the Egyptians the wages they had earned, or as a servant steals his well-earned wages from a harsh master; in the same way do you also steal your wife and child from the Pope.

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

(a) It is not every priest that can do without a woman, not only on account of human frailty, but still more for his household. If therefore he takes a woman, and the Pope allows this, but will not let them marry, what is this but expecting a man and a woman to live together and not to fall? Just as if one were to set fire to straw, and command it should neither smoke nor burn.

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

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

But if you object that this would give offence, and that one must first obtain the Pope's dispensation, I answer that if there is any offence in it, it is the fault of the see of Rome, which has made unjust and unholy laws. It is no offence to God and the Scriptures. Even where the Pope has power to grant dispensation for money by his covetous tyrannical laws, every Christian has power to grant dispensation in the same matter for the sake of Christ and the salvation of souls. For Christ has freed us from all human laws, especially when they are opposed to God and the salvation of souls, as St. Paul teaches (Gal. v. 1 and 1 Cor. viii. 9, 10).

15. I must not forget the poor convents. The evil spirit, who has troubled all estates of life by human laws, and made them unendurable, has taken possession of some abbots, abbesses, and prelates, and led them so to rule their brothers and sisters that they do but go soon to hell, and live a wretched life even upon earth, as is the case with all the devil's martyrs. For they have reserved in confession all, or at least some, deadly sins, which are secret, and from these no brother may on pain of excommunication and on his obedience absolve another. Now we do not always find angels everywhere, but men of flesh and blood, who would rather incur all excommunication and menace than confess their secret sins to a prelate or the confessor appointed for them;

consequently they receive the Sacrament with these sins on their conscience, by which they become *irregular* and suffer much misery. oh blind shepherds! Oh foolish prelates! Oh ravenous wolves! Now I say that in cases where a sin is public and notorious it is only right that the prelate alone should punish it, and such sins, and no others, he may reserve and except for himself; over private sins he has no authority, even though they may be the worst that can be committed or imagined. And if the prelate excepts these, he becomes a tyrant and interferes with God's judgment.

Accordingly I advised these children, brothers and sisters: If your superiors will not allow you to confess your secret sins to whomsoever you will, then take them yourself, and confess them to your brother or sister, to whomsoever you will; be absolved and comforted, and then go or do what your wish or duty commands; only believe firmly that you have been absolved, and nothing more is necessary. And let not their threats of excommunication, or *irregularity*, or what not, trouble or disturb you; these only apply to public or notorious sins, if they are not confessed: you are not touched by them. How canst thou take upon thyself, thou blind prelate, to restrain private sins by thy threats? Give up what thou canst keep publicly; let God's judgment and mercy also have its place with thy inferiors. He has not given them into thy hands so completely as to have let them go out of His own; nay, thou hast received the smaller portion. Consider thy statutes as nothing more than thy statutes, and do not make them equal to God's judgment in heaven.

16. It were also right to abolish annual festivals, processions, and masses for the dead, or at least to diminish their number; for we evidently see that they have become no better than a mockery, exciting the anger of God and having no object but money-getting, gluttony, and carousals. How should it please God to hear the poor vigils and masses mumbled in this wretched way, neither read nor prayed? Even when they are properly read, it is not done freely for the love of God, but for the love of money and as payment of a debt. Now it is impossible that anything should please God or win anything from Him that is not done freely, out of love for Him. Therefore, as true Christians, we ought to abolish or lessen a practice that we see is abused, and that angers God instead of appeasing Him. I should prefer, and it would be more agreeable to God's will, and far better for a foundation, church, or convent, to put all the yearly masses and vigils together into one mass, so that they would every year celebrate, on one day, a true vigil and mass with hearty sincerity, devotion, and faith for all their benefactors. This would be better than their thousand upon thousand masses said every year, each for a particular benefactor, without devotion and faith. My dear fellow-Christians, God cares not for much prayer, but for good prayer. Nay, He condemns long and frequent prayers, saying, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward" (Matt. vi. 2, *seq.*). But it is the greed that cannot trust God by which such practices are set up; it is afraid it will die of starvation.

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

spiritual law; for the canon or spiritual law is so called because it comes from a spirit, not, however, from the Holy Spirit, but from the evil spirit.

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

The other punishments and penalties—suspension, irregularity, aggravation, reagravation, deposition, thundering, lightning, cursing, damning, and what not—all these should be buried ten fathoms deep in the earth, that their very name and memory may no longer live upon earth. The evil spirit, who was let loose by the spiritual law, has brought all this terrible plague and misery into the heavenly kingdom of the holy Church, and has thereby brought about nothing but the harm and destruction of souls, that we may well apply to it the words of Christ, “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matt. xxiii. 13).

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

Besides these spiritual evils, these saints’ days inflict bodily injury on the common man in two ways: he loses a day’s work, and he spends more than usual, besides weakening his body and making himself unfit for labour, as we see every day, and yet no one tries to improve it. One should not consider whether the Pope instituted these festivals, or whether we require his dispensation or permission. If anything is contrary to God’s will and harmful to men in body and soul, not only has every community, council, or government authority to prevent and abolish such wrong without the knowledge or consent of pope or bishop, but it is their duty, as they value their soul’s salvation, to prevent it, even though pope and bishop (that should be the first to do so) are unwilling to see it stopped. And first of all we should abolish church wakes, since they are nothing but taverns, fairs, and gaming places, to the greater dishonour of God and the damnation of souls. It is no good to make a talk about their having had a good origin and being good works. Did not God set aside His own law that He had given forth out of heaven when He saw that it was abused, and does He not now reverse every day what He has appointed, and destroy what He has made, on account of the same perverse misuse, as it is written in Psalm xviii. (ver. 26), “With the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward”?

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

Besides this, fasts must be made optional, and every kind of food made free, as is commanded in the Gospels (Matt. xv. 11). For whilst at Rome they laugh at fasts, they let us abroad consume oil which they would not think fit for greasing their boots, and then sell us the liberty of eating butter and other things, whereas the Apostle says that the Gospel has given us freedom in all such matters (1 Cor. x. 25, *seq.*). But they have caught us in their canon law and have robbed us of this right, so that we have to buy it back from them; they have so terrified the consciences of the people that one cannot preach this liberty without rousing the anger of the people, who think the eating of butter to be a worse sin than lying, swearing, and unchastity. We may make of it what we will; it is but the work of man, and no good can ever come of it.

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

The miracles performed there prove nothing, for the evil one can show also wonders, as Christ has taught us (Matt. xxiv. 24). If they took up the matter earnestly and forbade such doings, the miracles would soon cease: or if they were done by God, they would not be prevented by their commands. And if there were nothing else to prove that these are not works of God, it would be enough that people go about turbulently and irrationally like herds of cattle, which could not possibly come from God. God has not commanded it; there is no obedience, and no merit in it; and therefore it should be vigorously interfered with, and the people warned against it. For what is not commanded by God and goes beyond God's commandments is surely the devil's own work. In this way also the parish churches suffer: in that they are less venerated. In fine, these pilgrimages are signs of great want of faith in the people; for if they truly believed, they would find all things in their own churches, where they are commanded to go.

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

Here a man finds baptism, the Sacrament, preaching, and his neighbour, and these are more than all the saints in heaven, for it is by God’s word and sacrament that they have all been hallowed.

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

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

Here must be added that one should abolish, or treat as of no account, or give to all Churches alike, the licences, bulls, and whatever the Pope sells at his flaying-ground at Rome. For if he sells or gives to Wittenberg, to Halle, to Venice, and above all, to his own city of Rome, permissions, privileges, indul-

gences, graces, advantages, faculties, why does he not give them to all Churches alike? Is it not his duty to do all that he can for all Christians without reward, solely for God's sake, nay even to shed his blood for them? Why then, I should like to know, does he give or sell these things to one Church and not to another? Or does this accursed gold make a difference in his Holiness's eyes between Christians who all alike have baptism, Gospel, faith, Christ, God, and all things? Do they wish us to be blind, when our eyes can see, to be fools, when we have reason, that we should worship this greed, knavery, and delusion? He is a shepherd, forsooth—so long as you have money, no further; and yet they are not ashamed to practise all this knavery right and left with their bulls. They care only for that accursed gold, and for nought besides.

Therefore my advice is this: If this folly is not done away with, let all pious Christians open their eyes, and not be deceived by these Romish bulls and seals and all their specious pretences; let them stop at home in their own churches, and be satisfied with their baptism, Gospel, faith, Christ, and God (who is everywhere the same), and let the Pope continue to be a blind leader of the blind. Neither pope nor angel can give you as much as God gives you in your own parish; nay, he only leads you away from God's gifts, which you have for nothing, to his own gifts, which you must buy, giving you lead for gold, skin for meat, strings for a purse, wax for honey, words for goods, the letter for the spirit, as you can see for yourselves though you will not perceive it. If you try to ride to heaven on the Pope's wax and parchment, your carriage will soon break down, and you will fall into hell, not in God's name.

Let this be a fixed rule for you: Whatever has to be bought of the Pope is neither good, nor of God. For whatever comes from God is not only given freely, but all the world is punished and condemned for not accepting it freely. So is it with the Gospel and the works of God. We have deserved to be led into these errors, because we have despised God's holy word and the grace of baptism; as St. Paul says, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. iii. 11, 12).

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

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

and the useless robberies of the Roman see; so that it is to my mind one of the greatest of God's miracles how we manage to live and support ourselves.

Some may think that in this way the poor would not be well cared for, and that such great stone houses and convents would not be built, and not so plentifully, and I think so too. Nor is it necessary. If a man will be poor, he should not be rich; if he will be rich, let him put his hand to the plough, and get wealth himself out of the earth. It is enough to provide decently for the poor, that they may not die of cold and hunger. It is not right that one should work that another may be idle, and life ill that another may lie well, as is now the perverse abuse, for St. Paul says, "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. iii. 10). God has not ordained that any one should live off the goods of others, except priests and ministers alone, as St. Paul says (1 Cor. ix. 14), for their spiritual work's sake, as also Christ says to the Apostles, "The labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke x. 7).

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

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

All this, however, does not apply to the old foundations and chapters, which were doubtless founded in order that since, according to the custom of Germany, all the children of nobles cannot be land-owners and rulers, they should be provided for in these foundations, and these serve God freely, study, and become learned themselves, and help others to acquire learning. I am speaking only of the new foundations, endowed for prayers and masses, by the example of which the old foundations have become burdened with the like prayers and masses, making them of very little, if of any, use. Through God's righteous punishment, they have at last come down to the dregs, as they deserve—that is, to the noise of singers and organs, and cold, spiritless masses, with no end but to gain and spend the money due to them. Popes, bishops, and doctors should examine and report on such things; as it is they are the guiltiest, allowing anything that brings them money; the blind ever leading the blind. This comes of covetousness and the canon law.

It must, moreover, not be allowed in future that one man should have more than one endowment or prebend. He should be content with a moderate position in life, so that others may have something besides himself; and thus we must put a stop to the excuses of those that say that they must have more than one office to enable them to live in their proper station. It is possible to estimate one's "proper station" in such a way that a whole kingdom would not

suffice to maintain it. So it is that covetousness and want of faith in God go hand in hand, and often men take for the requirements of their “proper station” what is mere covetousness and want of faith.

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

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

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

The children of Israel in old times were obliged to keep the oath that they had sworn, in ignorance and error, to the Gibeonites, their enemies; and King Zedekiah was destroyed utterly, with his people, because he broke the oath that he had sworn to the King of Babylon; and among us, a hundred years ago, the noble King Ladislaus V. of Poland and Hungary, was slain by the Turk, with so many of his people, because he allowed himself to be misled by papal legates and cardinals and broke the good and useful treaty that he had made with the Turk. The pious Emperor Sigismond had no good fortune after the

Council of Constance, in which he allowed the knaves to violate the safe-conduct that he had promised to John Huss and Jerome; from this has followed all the miserable strife between Bohemia and ourselves. And in our own time, God help us! How much Christian blood has been shed on account of the oath and bond which Pope Julius made and unmade between the Emperor Maximilian and King Louis of France! How can I tell all the misery the popes have caused by such devilish insolence, claiming the power of breaking oaths between great lords, causing a shameful scandal for the sake of money? I hope the day of judgment is at hand; things cannot and will not become worse than the dealings of the Roman chair. The Pope treads God's commandments under foot and exalts his own; if this is not antichrist, I do not know what is. But of this, and to more purpose, another time.

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

First of all, we must honestly confess the truth, without attempting self-justification, and own one thing to the Bohemians, namely that John Huss and Jerome of Prague were burnt at Constance in violation of the papal, Christian, and imperial oath and safe-conduct, and that thus God's commandment was broken and the Bohemians excited to great anger. And though they may have deserved such great wrong and disobedience to God on our part, they were not obliged to approve it and think it right. Nay, even now they should run any danger of life and limb rather than own that it is right to break an imperial, papal, Christian safe-conduct and act faithlessly in opposition to it. Therefore, though the Bohemians may be to blame for their impatience, yet the Pope and his followers are most to blame for all the misery, all the error and destruction of souls that followed this council of Constance.

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

All I say is this: Granting he was a heretic, however bad he may have been, yet he was burnt unjustly and in violation of God's commandments, and we must not force the Bohemians to approve this, if we wish ever to be at one with them. Plain truth must unite us, not obstinacy. It is no use to say, as they said at the time, that a safe-conduct need not be kept, if promised to a heretic; that is as much as to say, one may break God's commandments in order to keep God's commandments. They were infatuated and blinded by the devil, that they could not see what they said or did. God has commanded us to ob-

serve a safe-conduct; and this we must do though the world should perish: much more then where it is only a question of a heretic being set free. We should overcome heretics with books, not with fire, as the old Fathers did. If there were any skill in overcoming heretics with fire, the executioner would be the most learned doctor in the world; and there would be no need to study, but he that could get another into his power could burn him.

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

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

I do not advise that they be forced to abandon the Sacrament in both kinds, for it is neither unchristian nor heretical. They should be allowed to continue in their present way; but the new bishop must see that there be no dissensions about this matter, and they must learn that neither practice is actually wrong, just as there need be no disputes about the priests not wearing the same dress as the laity. In the same way, if they do not wish to submit to the canon laws of the Roman Church, we must not force them, but we must content ourselves with seeing that they live in faith and according to the Scriptures. For Christian life and Christian faith may very well exist without the Pope's unbearable laws; nay, they cannot well exist until there are fewer of those laws or none. Our baptism has freed us and made us subject to God's word alone; why then should we suffer a man to make us the slaves of his words? As St. Paul says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. v. 1).

If I knew that the only error of the Hussites was that they believe that in the Sacrament of the altar there is true bread and wine, though under it the

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

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

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

25. The universities also require a good, sound reformation. I must say this, let it vex whom it may. The fact is that whatever the papacy has ordered or instituted is only designed for the propagation of sin and error. What are the universities, as at present ordered, but, as the book of Maccabees says, "schools of 'Greek fashion' and 'heathenish manners'" (2 Macc. iv. 12, 13), full of dissolute living, where very little is taught of the Holy Scriptures and of the Christian faith, and the blind heathen teacher, Aristotle, rules even further than Christ? Now, my advice would be that the books of Aristotle, the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, *Of the Soul*, *Ethics*, which have hitherto been considered the best, be altogether abolished, with all others that profess to treat of nature, though nothing can be learned from them, either of natural or of spiritual things. Besides, no one has been able to understand his meaning, and much time has been wasted and many noble souls vexed with much useless labour, study, and expense. I venture to say that any potter has more knowledge of natural things than is to be found in these books. My heart is grieved to see how many of the best Christians this accursed, proud, knavish heathen has fooled and led astray with his false words. God sent him as a plague for our sins.

Does not the wretched man in his best book, *Of the Soul*, teach that the soul dies with the body, though many have tried to save him with vain words, as if we had not the Holy Scriptures to teach us fully of all things of which Aristotle had not the slightest perception? Yet this dead heathen has conquered, and has hindered and almost suppressed the books of the living God; so that, when I see all this misery I cannot but think that the evil spirit has introduced this study.

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

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

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

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

The civil law, too, good God! what a wilderness it is become! it is, indeed, much better, more skilful, and more honest than the canon law, of which nothing is good but the name. Still there is far too much of it. Surely good governors, in addition to the Holy Scriptures, would be law enough; as St. Paul says, "Is it so that there is not a wise man among you, no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?" (1 Cor. vi. 5). I think also that the common law and the usage of the country should be preferred to the law of the empire, and that the law of the empire should only be used in cases of necessity. And would to God, that, as each land has its own peculiar character and nature, they could all be governed by their own simple laws, just as they were governed before the law of the empire was devised, and as many are governed even now! Elaborate and far-fetched laws are only burdensome to the people, and a hindrance rather than a help to business. But I hope that others have thought of this, and considered it to more purpose than I could.

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

Since then we hold the name and title of teachers of the Holy Scriptures, we should verily be forced to act according to our title, and to teach the Holy Scriptures and nothing else. Although, indeed, it is a proud, pre sumptuous title for a man to proclaim himself teacher of the Scriptures, still it could be suffered, if the works confirmed the title. But as it is, under the rule of the Sentences, we find among theologians more human and heathenish fallacies than true holy knowledge of the Scriptures. What then are we to do? I know not, except to pray humbly to God to give us Doctors of Theology. Doctors of Arts, of Medicine, of Law, of the Sentences, may be made by popes, emperors, and the universities; but of this we may be certain: a Doctor of the Holy

Scriptures can be made by none but the Holy Ghost, as Christ says, "They shall all be taught of God" (John vi. 45). Now the Holy Ghost does not consider red caps or brown, or any other pomp, nor whether we are young or old, layman or priest, monk or secular, virgin or married; nay, He once spoke by an ass against the prophet that rode on it. Would to God we were worthy of having such doctors given us, be they laymen or priests, married or unmarried! But now they try to force the Holy Ghost to enter into popes, bishops, or doctors, though there is no sign to show that He is in them.

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

Above all, in schools of all kinds the chief and most common lesson should be the Scriptures, and for young boys the Gospel; and would to God each town had also a girls' school, in which girls might be taught the Gospel for an hour daily, either in German or Latin! In truth, schools, monasteries, and convents were founded for this purpose, and with good Christian intentions, as we read concerning St Agnes and other saints; then were there holy virgins and martyrs; and in those times it was well with Christendom; but now it has been turned into nothing but praying and singing. Should not every Christian be expected by his ninth or tenth year to know all the holy Gospels, containing as they do his very name and life? A spinner or a seamstress teaches her daughter her trade while she is young, but now even the most learned prelates and bishops do not know the Gospel.

Oh, how badly we treat all these poor young people that are entrusted to us for discipline and instruction! and a heavy reckoning shall we have to give for it that we keep them from the word of God; their fate is that described by Jeremiah: "Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom" (Lam. ii. 11, 12). We do not perceive all this misery, how the young folk are being pitifully corrupted in the midst of Christendom, all for want of the Gospel, which we should always read and study with them.

However, even if the high schools studied the Scriptures diligently we should not send every one to them, as we do now, when nothing is considered but numbers, and every man wishes to have a Doctor's title; we should only send the aptest pupils, well prepared in the lower schools. This should be seen to by princes or the magistrates of the towns, and they should take care none but apt pupils be sent. But where the Holy Scriptures are not the rule, I advise no one to send his child. Everything must perish where God's word is not studied unceasingly; and so we see what manner of men there are now in the high schools, and all this is the fault of no one but of the Pope, the bishops,

and the prelates, to whom the welfare of the young has been entrusted. For the high schools should only train men of good understanding in the Scriptures, who wish to become bishops and priests, and to stand at our head against heretics and the devil and all the world. But where do we find this? I greatly fear the high schools are nothing but great gates of hell, unless they diligently study the Holy Scriptures and teach them to the young people.

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

There is no doubt that the true Roman empire, of which the prophets (Num. xxiv. 24 and Daniel ii. 44) spoke, was long ago destroyed, as Balaam clearly foretold, saying, "And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever" (Num. xxiv. 24). And this was done by the Goths, and more especially since the empire of the Turks was formed, about one thousand years ago, and so gradually Asia and Africa were lost, and subsequently France, Spain, and finally Venice arose, so that Rome retains no part of its former power.

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

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

Well, for our Lord God it is a small thing to toss kingdoms and principalities hither and thither; He is so free with them that He will sometimes take a kingdom from a good man and give it to a knave, sometimes through the treachery of false, wicked men, sometimes by inheritance, as we read concerning Persia, Greece, and nearly all kingdoms; and Daniel says, "Wisdom and might are His; and He changes the times and the seasons, and He removeth kings and setteth up kings" (Dan. ii. 20, 21). Therefore no one need think it a grand matter if he has a kingdom given to him, especially if he be a Christian;

and so we Germans need not be proud of having had a new Roman empire given us. For in His eyes it is a poor gift, that He sometimes gives to the least deserving, as Daniel says, “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Dan. iv. 35).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

27. Let this be enough about the faults of the spiritual estate, though many more might be found, if the matter were properly considered; we must now consider the defects of the temporal estates. In the first place, we require a general law and consent of the German nation against profusion and extravagance in dress, which is the cause of so much poverty among the nobles and the people. Surely God has given to us, as to other nations, enough wool, fur, flax, and whatever else is required for the decent clothing of every class; and it cannot be necessary to spend such enormous sums for silk, velvet, cloth of gold, and all other kinds of outlandish stuff. I think that even if the Pope did not rob us Germans with his unbearable taxes, we should be robbed more than enough by these secret thieves, the dealers in silk and velvet. As it is, we see that every man wishes to be every other man's equal, and that this causes and increases pride and envy among us, as we deserve, all which would cease, with many other misfortunes, if our self-will would but let us be gratefully content with what God has given us.

It is similarly necessary to diminish the use of spices, which is one of the ships in which our gold is sent away from Germany. God's mercy has given us more food, and that both precious and good, than is to be found in other countries. I shall probably be accused of making foolish and impossible sugges-

tions, as if I wished to destroy the great business of commerce. But I am only doing my part; if the community does not mend matters, every man should do it himself. I do not see many good manners that have ever come into a land through commerce, and therefore God let the people of Israel dwell far from the sea and not carry on much trade.

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

My request and my cry therefore is this: Let each man consider the destruction of himself and his family, which is no longer at the door, but has entered the house; and let emperors, princes, lords, and corporations see to the condemnation and prohibition of this kind of trade, with out considering the opposition of the Pope and all his justice and injustice, nor whether livings or endowments depend upon it. Better a single fief in a city based on a freehold estate or honest interest, than a hundred based on usury; yea, a single endowment on usury is worse and more grievous than twenty based on freehold estate. Truly this usury is a sign and warning that the world has been given over to the devil for its sins, and that we are losing our spiritual and temporal welfare alike; yet we heed it not.

Doubtless we should also find some bridle for the *Fuggers* and similar companies. Is it possible that in a single man's lifetime such great wealth should be collected together, if all were done rightly and according to God's will? I am not skilled in accounts, but I do not understand how it is possible for one hundred guilders to gain twenty in a year, or how one guilder can gain another, and that not out of the soil, or by cattle, seeing that possessions depend not on the wit of men, but on the blessing of God. I commend this to those that are skilled in worldly affairs. I as a theologian blame nothing but the evil appearance, of which St. Paul says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. v. 22). All I know is that it were much more godly to encourage agriculture and lessen commerce; and that they do the best who, according to the Scriptures, till the ground to get their living, as we are all commanded in Adam: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake.. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. . .In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread" (Gen. iii. 17-19). There is still much ground that is not ploughed or tilled.

Then there is the excess in eating and drinking, for which we Germans have an ill reputation in foreign countries, as our special vice, and which has become so common, and gained so much the upper hand, that sermons avail nothing. The loss of money caused by it is not the worst; but in its train come murder, adultery, theft, blasphemy, and all vices. The temporal power should do something to prevent it; otherwise it will come to pass, as Christ foretold, that the last day shall come as a thief in the night, and shall find them eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, planting and building, buying and selling (Matt. xxiv. 38; Luke xvii. 26), just as things go on now, and that so strongly that I apprehend lest the day of judgment be at hand, even now when we least expect it.

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

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

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

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

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

But this may suffice for the present. For of what concerns the temporal authority and the nobles I have, I think, said enough in my tract on *Good Works*. For their lives and governments leave room enough for improvement; but

there is no comparison between spiritual and temporal abuses, as I have there shown. I daresay I have sung a lofty strain, that I have proposed many things that will be thought impossible, and attacked many points too sharply. But what was I to do? I was bound to say this: if I had the power, this is what I would do. I had rather incur the world's anger than God's; they cannot take from me more than my life. I have hitherto made many offers of peace to my adversaries; but, as I see, God has forced me through them to open my mouth wider and wider, and, because they do not keep quiet, to give them enough cause for speaking, barking, shouting, and writing. Well, then, I have another song still to sing concerning them and Rome; if they wish to hear it, I will sing it to them, and sing with all my might. Do you understand, my friend Rome, what I mean?

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

At Wittenberg, in the year 1520.