

## The Protestant Reformation (1300-1700)

### Petrarch, Letter to a Friend (1350)

...Now I am living in France, in the Babylon of the West. The sun in its travels sees nothing more hideous than this place on the shores of the wild Rhone, which suggests the hellish streams of Cocytus and Acheron. Here reign the successors of the poor fishermen of Galilee; they have strangely forgotten their origin. I am astounded, as I recall their predecessors, to see these men loaded with gold and clad in purple, boasting of the spoils of princes and nations; to see luxurious palaces and heights crowned with fortifications, instead of a boat turned downward for shelter.

We no longer find the simple nets which were once used to gain a frugal sustenance from the lake of Galilee, and with which, having labored all night and caught nothing, they took, at daybreak, a multitude of fishes, in the name of Jesus. One is stupefied nowadays to hear the lying tongues, and to see worthless parchments turned by a leaden seal into nets which are used, in Christ's name, but by the arts of Belial, to catch hordes of unwary Christians. These fish, too, are dressed and laid on the burning coals of anxiety before they fill the insatiable maw of their captors.

Instead of holy solitude we find a criminal host and crowds of the most infamous satellites; instead of soberness, licentious banquets; instead of pious pilgrimages, preternatural and foul sloth; instead of the bare feet of the apostles, the snowy coursers of brigands fly past us, the horses decked in gold and fed on gold, soon to be shod with gold, if the Lord does not check this slavish luxury. In short, we seem to be among the kings of the Persians or Parthians, before whom we must fall down and worship, and who cannot be approached except presents be offered. O ye unkempt and emaciated old men, is it for this you labored? Is it for this that you have sown the field of the Lord and watered it with your holy blood? But let us leave the subject.

I have been so depressed and overcome that the heaviness of my soul has passed into bodily affliction, so that I am really ill and can only give voice to sighs and groans.

### St. Catherine of Siena: Letter to Pope Gregory XI (1375)

In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of sweet Mary: Most holy and most reverend my father in Christ Jesus: I Catherine your poor unworthy daughter, servant and slave of the servants of Christ, write to you in His precious blood; with desire to see you a good shepherd. For I reflect, sweet my father, that the wolf is carrying away your sheep, and there is no one found to succor them. So I hasten to you, our father and our shepherd, begging you on behalf of Christ crucified to learn from Him, who with such fire of love gave Himself to the shameful death of the most holy cross, how to rescue that lost sheep, the human race, from the hands of the demons; because through man's rebellion against God they were holding him for their own possession.

Then comes the Infinite Goodness of God, and sees the evil state and the loss and the ruin of these sheep, and sees that they cannot be won back to Him by wrath or war. For the heart of man is in no way so drawn as by love, because he was created by love. This seems to be the reason why he loves so much: he was created by nothing but love, both his soul and his body. For by love God created him in His Image and Likeness, and by love his father and mother gave him substance, conceiving and bearing a son.

But if you will wreak vengeance and justice, inflict them on me, poor wretch, and assign me any pain and torment that may please you, even death. I believe that through the foulness of my iniquities many evils have occurred, and many misfortunes and discords. On me then, your poor daughter, take any vengeance that you will. Ah me, father, I die of grief and cannot die! Come, come, and resist no more the will of God that calls you; the hungry sheep await your coming to hold and possess the place of your predecessor and Champion, Apostle Peter. For you, as the Vicar of Christ, should abide in your own place. Come, then, come, and delay no more; and comfort you, and fear not anything that might happen, since God will be with you. I ask humbly your benediction for me and all my sons; and I beg you to pardon my presumption. I say no more. Remain in the holy and sweet grace of God-Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love.

### Letter of Catherine of Siena to Three Italian Cardinals (1379)

Dearest brothers and fathers in Christ sweet Jesus: I Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, write to you in His precious Blood: with desire to see you turn back to the true and most perfect light, leaving the deep shadows of blindness into which you are fallen. Then you shall be fathers to me; otherwise not. Yes, indeed, I call you fathers in so far as you shall leave death and turn back to life (for, as things go now, you are parted from the life of grace, limbs cut off from your head from which you drew life), when you shall stand united in faith, and in that perfect obedience to Pope Urban VI, in which those abide who have the light, and in light know the truth, and knowing it love it.

Oh wretched men, the darkness of self-love does not let you know the truth. Oh, how will this blindness be reproved at the last moment in every rational being, and much the more in those whom God has taken from the filth of the world, and assigned to the greatest excellence that can be, having made them ministers of the Blood of the humble and spotless Lamb!

Where is the gratitude which you ought to have for the Bride who has nourished you at her breast? What shows me that you are ungrateful, coarse, and mercenary? The persecution which you, together with others, are inflicting on that sweet Bride, at a time when you ought to be shields, to ward off the blows of heresy. In spite of which, you clearly know the truth, that Pope Urban VI is truly Pope, the highest Pontiff, chosen in orderly election, not influenced by fear, truly rather by divine inspiration than by your human industry. You have turned your backs...you have divided you from the truth which strengthens us, and drawn close to falsehood.

What made you do this? The poison of self-love, which has

infected the world. You know what the truth is: it was you who announced it to us. Oh how mad you are! For you told us the truth, and you want yourselves to taste a lie! Now you want to corrupt this truth, and make us see the opposite, saying that you chose Pope Urban from fear, which is not so. If I turn to the election ordained by your lips, we know that you chose him canonically and not through fear. Ah, foolish men, worthy of a thousand deaths! As blind, you do not see your own wrong, and have fallen into such confusion that you make of your own selves liars. What can I say? I can say that he who is not for the truth is against the truth; he who was not at that time for Christ on earth, Pope Urban VI, was against him. Therefore I tell you that you did wrong in electing an antipope, and I may say that he was chosen a member of the devil; for had he been a member of Christ, he would have chosen death rather than consent to so great an evil, for he well knows the truth. Now you have committed all these faults in regard to this devil: that is, to confess him as Pope, which he surely is not.

Oh me, no more thus for the love of God! Take refuge in humbling you beneath the mighty hand of God, in obedience to His Vicar, while you have time; for when the time is passed there will be no more help for us. Let it seem not hard to you if I pierce you with the words which the love of your salvation had made me write: rather would I pierce you with my living voice, did God permit me.

## **The Council of Constance (1414-1418)**

This council was summoned by John XXIII, the Pisan pope, with the support of Emperor Sigismund. It began on November 5, 1414, in the cathedral of Constance, with many bishops from all parts of Europe. Business in the council was transacted in a way that was largely new for an ecumenical council, namely votes were cast not by individual persons but by nations. The council, from the very beginning, proposed the following three topics:

1. To bring unity back to the church and to make an end to the schism which had divided the church since 1378 and which the council held at Pisa in 1409 had not healed but rather aggravated when it elected John XXIII as a third pope. When the council of Constance opened, Christians owed obedience to three different popes: some owed obedience to Gregory XII of the Roman party others to Benedict XIII of the Avignon party, and others to John XXIII. All three popes were deposed by the council. Then Martin V was elected pope on 11 November 1417 and he was regarded as the legitimate pontiff by the church as a whole.

2. To eradicate heresies, especially those spread by John Wyclif in Britain and by John Hus in Bohemia.

3. To reform the corrupt morals of the church. This, however, was only partly accomplished in the final sessions of the council.

### SESSION 3

[Decrees on the integrity and authority of the council]

For the honor, praise and glory of the most holy Trinity, Father and Son and holy Spirit, and to obtain on earth, for people of good will, the peace that was divinely promised in God's church, this holy synod, called the sacred general council of Constance, duly assembled here in the holy Spirit for the purpose of bringing union and reform to the said church in its head and members, discerns and declares, defines and ordains as follows.

First, that this synod was and is rightly and properly summoned to this city of Constance, and likewise has been rightly and properly begun and held.

Next, that this sacred council should not and may not be dissolved until the present schism has been entirely removed and until the church has been reformed in faith and morals, in head and members.

Next, that this sacred council may not be transferred to another place, except for a reasonable cause, which is to be debated and decided on by this sacred council.

### SESSION 5

[The famous *Haec Sancta* decree.]

In the name of the holy and undivided Trinity, Father and Son and holy Spirit. Amen. This holy synod of Constance, which is a general council, for the eradication of the present schism and for bringing unity and reform to God's church in head and members, legitimately assembled in the holy Spirit to the praise of almighty God, ordains, defines, decrees, discerns and declares as follows, in order that this union and reform of God's church may be obtained the more easily, securely, fruitfully and freely.

First it declares that, legitimately assembled in the holy Spirit, constituting a general council and representing the catholic church militant, it has power immediately from Christ; and that everyone of whatever state or dignity, even papal, is bound to obey it in those matters which pertain to the faith, the eradication of the said schism and the general reform of the said church of God in head and members.

Next, it declares that anyone of whatever condition, state or dignity, even papal, who contumaciously refuses to obey the past or future mandates, statutes, ordinances or precepts of this sacred council or of any other legitimately assembled general council, regarding the aforesaid things or matters pertaining to them, shall be subjected to well-deserved penance, unless he repents, and shall be duly punished, even by having recourse, if necessary, to other supports of the law.

### SESSION 8

[Sentence condemning various articles of John Wyclif]

We learn from the writings and deeds of the holy fathers that the catholic faith without which it is impossible to please God, has often been attacked by false followers of the same faith, or rather by perverse assailants, and by those who, desirous of the world's glory, are led on by proud curiosity to know more than they should; and that it has been defended against such persons by the church's faithful spiritual knights armed with the shield of faith.

Therefore in these spiritual wars the holy catholic church, illuminated in the truth of faith by the rays of light from above and remaining ever spotless through the Lord's providence and with the help of the patronage of the saints, has triumphed most gloriously over the darkness of error as over profligate enemies. In our times, however, that old and jealous foe has stirred up new conflicts so that the approved ones of this age may be made manifest. Their leader and prince was that pseudo-christian John Wyclif. He stubbornly asserted and taught many articles against the christian religion and the catholic faith while he was alive. We have decided that forty-five of the articles should be set out on this page as follows:

1. The material substance of bread, and similarly the material substance of wine, remain in the sacrament of the altar.
3. Christ is not identically and really present in the said sacrament in his own bodily persona.

4. If a bishop or a priest is in mortal sin, he does not ordain or confect or consecrate or baptize.
5. That Christ instituted the mass has no basis in the gospel.
7. If a person is duly contrite, all exterior confession is superfluous and useless for him.
10. It is against sacred scripture for ecclesiastics to have possessions.
11. No prelate should excommunicate anyone unless he first knows that the person has been excommunicated by God; he who does so thereby becomes a heretic and an excommunicated person.
14. It is lawful for any deacon or priest to preach the word of God without authorization from the apostolic see or from a catholic bishop.
15. Nobody is a civil lord or a prelate or a bishop while he is in mortal sin.
16. Secular lords can confiscate temporal goods from the church at their discretion when those who possess them are sinning habitually, that is to say sinning from habit and not just in particular acts.
17. The people can correct sinful lords at their discretion.
18. Tithes are purely alms, and parishioners can withhold them at will on account of their prelates' sins.
21. Whoever enters any religious order whatsoever, whether it be of monks or mendicants, makes himself less apt and suitable for the observance of God's commands.
24. Friars are bound to obtain their food by manual work and not by begging.
29. Universities, places of study, colleges, degrees and academic exercises in these institutions were introduced by a vain pagan spirit and benefit the church as little as does the devil.
33. Pope Silvester and the emperor Constantine erred in endowing the church.
36. The pope with all his clerics who have property are heretics, for the very reason that they have property; and so are all who abet them, namely all secular lords and other laity.
37. The Roman church is Satan's synagogue; and the pope is not the vicar of Christ and the apostles.
40. The election of a pope by the cardinals was introduced by the devil.
41. It is not necessary for salvation to believe that the Roman church is supreme among the other churches.
42. It is ridiculous to believe in the indulgences of popes and bishops.

[John Wyclif is pronounced a heretic, his memory condemned, and his bones are to be exhumed]

This holy synod, therefore, since a decree was issued to the effect that sentence should be heard on this day, declares, defines and decrees that the said John Wyclif was a notorious and obstinate heretic who died in heresy, and it anathematizes him and condemns his memory. It decrees and orders that his body and bones are to be exhumed, if they can be identified among the corpses of the faithful, and to be scattered far from a burial place of the church, in accordance with canonical and lawful sanctions.

#### SESSION 13

[Condemnation of communion under both kinds, recently revived among the Bohemians]

Certain people, in some parts of the world, have rashly dared to assert that the christian people ought to receive the holy sacrament of the eucharist under the forms of both bread and wine. They communicate the laity everywhere not only under the form of bread but also under that of wine, and they stubbornly assert that they should communicate even after a meal, or else without the need of a

fast, contrary to the church's custom which has been laudably and sensibly approved, but which they damnably try to repudiate as sacrilegious. Therefore this present general council of Constance, wishing to provide for the safety of the faithful against this error, after long deliberation by many persons learned in divine and human law, declares, decrees and defines that, although Christ instituted this venerable sacrament after a meal and ministered it to his apostles under the forms of both bread and wine, nevertheless, the praiseworthy authority of the sacred canons and the approved custom of the church have and do retain that this sacrament ought not to be celebrated after a meal nor received by the faithful without fasting, except in cases of sickness or some other necessity as permitted by law or by the church.

Although this sacrament was received by the faithful under both kinds in the early church, nevertheless later it was received under both kinds only by those confecting it, and by the laity only under the form of bread. For it should be very firmly believed, and in no way doubted, that the whole body and blood of Christ are truly contained under both the form of bread and the form of wine. Therefore, since this custom was introduced for good reasons by the church and holy fathers, and has been observed for a very long time, it should be held as a law which nobody may repudiate or alter at will without the church's permission.

#### SESSION 15

[More condemned articles of John Wyclif]

9. Oral confession to a priest, introduced by Innocent, is not as necessary to people as he claimed. For if anyone offends his brother in thought, word or deed, then it suffices to repent in thought, word or deed.
10. It is a grave and unsupported practice for a priest to hear the confessions of the people.
19. That the pope is supreme pontiff is ridiculous. Christ approved such a dignity neither in Peter nor in anyone else.
20. The pope is antichrist made manifest. Not only this particular person but also the multitude of popes. This is not altered by the fact that Gregory and other popes, who did many good and fruitful things in their lives, finally repented.
28. Just as a prince or a lord does not keep the title of his office while he is in mortal sin, except in name and equivocally, so it is with a pope, bishop or priest while he has fallen into mortal sin.
41. The people may withhold tithes, offerings and other private alms from unworthy disciples of Christ, since God's law requires this.

[Sentence against John Hus]

A certain John Hus, here present in person at this sacred council, who is a disciple not of Christ but rather of the heresiarch John Wyclif, has taught, asserted and preached many errors and heresies of Wyclif which have been condemned both by God's church and by other reverend fathers in Christ. He has done this especially by publicly resisting in the schools and in sermons, together with his accomplices, the condemnation in scholastic form of the said articles of John Wyclif which has been made many times at the university of Prague, and he has declared the said John Wyclif to be a catholic man and an evangelical doctor, thus supporting his teaching, before a multitude of clergy and people.

This most holy synod of Constance therefore declares and defines that the articles which have been found on examination, by many masters in sacred scripture, to be contained in his books and pamphlets written in his own hand, and which the same John Hus at a public hearing, before the fathers and prelates of this sacred council, has confessed to be contained in his books and pamphlets,

are not catholic and should not be taught to be such but rather many of them are erroneous, others scandalous, others offensive to the ears of the devout, many of them are rash and seditious, and some of them are notoriously heretical, and it strictly forbids them to be preached, taught or in any way approved. Moreover, this most holy synod therefore reproveth and condemns the aforesaid books and his teaching, as well as the other treatises and pamphlets written by him in Latin or in Czech, or translated by one or more other persons into any other language, and it decrees and determines that they should be publicly and solemnly burnt in the presence of the clergy and people in the city of Constance and elsewhere.

[Sentence condemning John Hus to be burned at the stake]

This most holy synod of Constance, invoking Christ's name and having God alone before its eyes, therefore pronounces, decrees and defines by this definitive sentence, which is here written down, that the said John Hus was and is a true and manifest heretic and has taught and publicly preached, to the great offence of the divine Majesty, to the scandal of the universal church and to the detriment of the catholic faith. He has persisted in these things for many years with a hardened heart. He has greatly scandalized Christ's faithful by his obstinacy since, bypassing the church's intermediaries, he has made appeal directly to our lord Jesus Christ, as to the supreme judge. This holy synod therefore pronounces the said John Hus, on account of the aforesaid and many other matters, to have been a heretic and it judges him to be considered and condemned as a heretic, and it hereby condemns him. This holy synod of Constance, seeing that God's church has nothing more that it can do, relinquishes John Hus to the judgment of the secular authority and decrees that he is to be relinquished to the secular court.

[Condemned articles of J. Hus]

1. There is only one holy universal church, which is the total number of those predestined to salvation.
5. A person foreknown to damnation is never part of the holy church, even if he is in a state of grace according to present justice; a person predestined to salvation always remains a member of the church, even though he may fall away for a time from adventitious grace, for he keeps the grace of predestination.
7. Peter neither was nor is the head of the holy catholic church.
9. The papal dignity originated with the emperor, and the primacy and institution of the pope emanated from imperial power.
13. The pope is not the manifest and true successor of the prince of the apostles, Peter, if he lives in a way contrary to Peter's. If he seeks avarice, he is the vicar of Judas Iscariot. Likewise, cardinals are not the manifest and true successors of the college of Christ's other apostles unless they live after the manner of the apostles, keeping the commandments and counsels of our lord Jesus Christ.
28. Christ would govern his church better by his true disciples scattered throughout the world, without these monstrous heads.

Jan Hus: Final Declaration, July 1, 1415

I, Jan Hus, in hope a priest of Jesus Christ, fearing to offend God, and fearing to fall into perjury, do hereby profess my unwillingness to abjure all or any of the articles produced against me by false witnesses. For God is my witness that I neither preached, affirmed, nor defended them, though they say that I did. Moreover, concerning the articles that they have extracted from my books, I say that I detest any false interpretation which any of them bears. But inasmuch as I fear to offend against the truth, or to gainsay the opinion of the doctors of the Church, I cannot abjure any one of

them. And if it were possible that my voice could now reach the whole world, as at the Day of Judgment every lie and every sin that I have committed will be made manifest, then would I gladly abjure before all the world every falsehood and error which I either had thought of saying or actually said!

I say I write this of my own free will and choice. Written with my own hand, on the first day of July.

SESSION 39: October 9, 1417

[On general councils: the famous decree *Frequens*]

The frequent holding of general councils is a pre-eminent means of cultivating the Lord's patrimony. It roots out the briars, thorns and thistles of heresies, errors and schisms, corrects deviations, reforms what is deformed and produces a richly fertile crop for the Lord's vineyard. Neglect of councils, on the other hand, spreads and fosters the aforesaid evils. This conclusion is brought before our eyes by the memory of past times and reflection on the present situation. For this reason we establish, enact, decree and ordain, by a perpetual edict, that general councils shall be held henceforth in the following way. The first shall follow in five years immediately after the end of this council, the second in seven years immediately after the end of the next council, and thereafter they are to be held every ten years for ever. They are to be held in places which the *supreme pontiff is bound* to nominate and assign within a month before the end of each preceding council, with the approval and consent of the council, or which, in his default, the council itself is bound to nominate. Thus, by a certain continuity, there will always be either a council in existence or one expected within a given time. If perchance emergencies arise, the time may be shortened by the supreme pontiff, acting on the advice of his brothers, the cardinals of the Roman church, but it may never be prolonged.

[On the profession to be made by the pope]

Since the Roman pontiff exercises such great power among mortals, it is right that he be bound all the more by the incontrovertible bonds of the faith and by the rites that are to be observed regarding the church's sacraments. We therefore decree and ordain, in order that the fullness of the faith may shine in a future Roman pontiff with singular splendor from the earliest moments of his becoming pope, that henceforth whoever is to be elected Roman pontiff shall make the following confession and profession in public, in front of his electors, before his election is published.

"In the name of the holy and undivided Trinity, Father and Son and holy Spirit. Amen. In the year of our Lord's nativity one thousand etc., I, N., elected pope, with both heart and mouth confess and profess to almighty God, whose church I undertake with his assistance to govern, and to blessed Peter, prince of the apostles, that as long as I am in this fragile life I will firmly believe and hold the catholic faith, according to the traditions of the apostles, of the general councils and of other holy fathers, especially of *the* eight holy universal councils-namely:

The first at Nicaea, the second at Constantinople, the third at Ephesus, the fourth at Chalcedon, the fifth and sixth at Constantinople, the seventh at Nicaea, and the eighth at Constantinople; As well as of the general councils at the: Lateran, Lyons and Vienne, and I will preserve this faith unchanged to the last dot and will confirm, defend and preach it to the point of death and the shedding of my blood, and likewise I will follow and observe in every way the rite handed down of the ecclesiastical sacraments of the catholic church. This my profession and

confession, written at my orders by a notary of the holy Roman church, I have signed below with my own hand. I sincerely offer it on this altar to you, almighty God, with a pure mind and a devout conscience.”

[On the manner and form of electing the pope]

For the praise, glory and honor of almighty God and for the peace and unity of the universal church and of the whole christian people, the election of the future Roman and supreme pontiff is soon to be held. We wish that it may be confirmed with greater authority and by the assent of many persons and that, mindful as we are of the state of the church, no doubts or scruples may later remain in people's minds regarding the said election but rather that a secure, true full and perfect union of the faithful may result from it. Therefore this most holy general synod of Constance declares, ordains and decrees that, for this time only, at the election of the Roman and supreme pontiff, there shall be added to the cardinals six prelates or other honorable churchmen in holy orders, from each of the nations currently present and named at the same synod, who are to be chosen by each of the said nations within ten days. The person is to be regarded as the Roman pontiff by the universal church without exception who is elected and admitted by two-thirds of the cardinals present at the conclave and by two-thirds of those from each nation who are to be and have been added to the cardinals.

### **Council of Basel-Florence (1431-45)**

The prospect of re-union with the eastern church provided an opportunity to transfer the council to another city. This move was supported by the council fathers loyal to the pope, who however were in a minority, and in the 25th session they voted for the city of Florence.

The Greek bishops and theologians attended the council of Florence from January 10, 1439. There the decree of union with the Greek church was approved. Subsequently decrees of union with the Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, Chaldean, and Maronite churches were approved.

Almost all the decrees of re-union were of little effect. Nevertheless it is significant that the church's unity was discussed in a council attended by some eastern bishops and theologians, and that there was agreement on the principal dogmatic and disciplinary questions which had divided the two churches for many centuries.

#### SESSION 1 (Basel)

[Purpose of the council of Basel]

Seeing that all things direct their actions more immediately and intensely the more knowledge they have of their destined purpose, so this holy synod, after intense meditation and thought on the needs of the christian religion and after mature and ordered deliberation, decrees that, with the help of God, it will pursue with all its zeal and attention these three ends. First that, with the banishment of the darkness of all heresies from the bounds of the christian people, the light of catholic truth, by the generosity of Christ the true light, may be resplendent. Secondly that, after due thought and with the help of the author of peace, the christian people, freed from the madness of wars by which it is affected and divided in various parts of the world, may be brought back to a peaceful and tranquil state. Thirdly, as the vine of Christ has already almost run wild on account of the multitude of thistles and thorns of vices crowding in upon it, to cut them back through the endeavor of necessary cultivation, with the work from on high of the evangelical husbandman, so that it may

flourish again and produce with happy abundance the fruits of virtue and esteem.

[On the Pope]

The supreme pontiff calls himself the servant of the servants of God; let him prove it in deeds. As long as people from all parts have recourse to him as to a common father, he should give them all easy access. Let him set aside at least one day in the week for a public audience, when he shall listen with patience and kindness to all, especially the poor and oppressed, and shall grant their prayers as much as he can with God's help, and shall assist all with kind advice and help as each one has need and as a father does for his children.

[On the number and qualities of cardinals]

Since the cardinals of the holy Roman church assist the supreme pontiff in directing the christian commonweal, it is essential that such persons be appointed as may be, like their name, real hinges on which the doors of the universal church move and are upheld. The sacred synod therefore decrees that henceforth their number shall be so adjusted that it is not a burden to the church which now, owing to the malice of the times, is afflicted by many serious inconveniences, or cheapened by being too large. They should be chosen from all the regions of Christianity, as far as this is convenient and possible, so that information on new things in the church may be more easily available for mature consideration. They should not exceed twenty-four in number, including the present cardinals. Not more than a third of them at any given time shall be from one nation, not more than one from any city or diocese. They should be men outstanding in knowledge, good conduct and practical experience. A very few of them may be sons, brothers or nephews of kings or great princes.

Nephews of the Roman pontiff, related to him through his brother or sister, or of any living cardinal shall not be made cardinals; nor shall bastards or the physically handicapped or those stained by a reputation of crime or infamy. There can, however, be added to the aforesaid twenty-four cardinals, on account of some great necessity or benefit for the church, two others who are outstanding in their sanctity of life and excellence of virtues, even if they do not possess the above-mentioned degrees, and some distinguished men from the Greeks, when they are united to the Roman church.

#### SESSION 6 (Florence)

[Definition of the holy ecumenical synod of Florence]

Eugenius, bishop, servant of the servants of God, for an everlasting record. With the agreement of our most dear son John Palaeologus, illustrious emperor of the Romans, of the deputies of our venerable brothers the patriarchs and of other representatives of the eastern church, to the following.

Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice. For, the wall that divided the western and the eastern church has been removed, peace and harmony have returned, since the corner-stone, Christ, who made both one, has joined both sides with a very strong bond of love and peace, uniting and holding them together in a covenant of everlasting unity. After a long haze of grief and a dark and unlovely gloom of long-enduring strife, the radiance of hoped-for union has illuminated all.

For when Latins and Greeks came together in this holy synod, they all strove that, among other things, the article about the procession of the holy Spirit should be discussed with the utmost care and assiduous investigation. Texts were produced from divine

scriptures and many authorities of eastern and western holy doctors, some saying the holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, others saying the procession is from the Father through the Son. All were aiming at the same meaning in different words. The Greeks asserted that when they claim that the holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, they do not intend to exclude the Son. The Latins asserted that they say the holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son not with the intention of excluding the Father from being the source and principle of all deity. Since, then, one and the same meaning resulted from all this, they unanimously agreed and consented to the following holy and God-pleasing union, in the same sense and with one mind.

In the name of the holy Trinity, Father, Son and holy Spirit, we define, with the approval of this holy universal council of Florence, that the following truth of faith shall be believed and accepted by all Christians and thus shall all profess it: that the holy Spirit is eternally from the Father and the Son, and has his essence and his subsistent being from the Father together with the Son, and proceeds from both eternally as from one principle and a single spiration. We define also that the explanation of those words "and from the Son" was licitly and reasonably added to the creed for the sake of declaring the truth and from imminent need.

Also, the body of Christ is truly confectioned in both unleavened and leavened wheat bread, and priests should confection the body of Christ in either, that is, each priest according to the custom of his western or eastern church. Also, if truly penitent people die in the love of God before they have made satisfaction for acts and omissions by worthy fruits of repentance, their souls are cleansed after death by cleansing pains; and the suffrages of the living faithful avail them in giving relief from such pains, that is, sacrifices of masses, prayers, almsgiving and other acts of devotion which have been customarily performed by some of the faithful for others of the faithful in accordance with the church's ordinances.

We also define that the holy apostolic see and the Roman pontiff holds the primacy over the whole world and the Roman pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter prince of the apostles, and that he is the true vicar of Christ, the head of the whole church and the father and teacher of all Christians, and to him was committed in blessed Peter the full power of tending, ruling and governing the whole church, as is contained also in the acts of ecumenical councils and in the sacred canons. Also, renewing the order of the other patriarchs which has been handed down in the canons, the patriarch of Constantinople should be second after the most holy Roman pontiff, third should be the patriarch of Alexandria, fourth the patriarch of Antioch, and fifth the patriarch of Jerusalem, without prejudice to all their privileges and rights.

## **Pius II: The Decree Execrabilis (1460)**

*By this decree Pope Pius II (1458-64) struck at the Conciliar movement, and labeled as "erroneous and detestable" one of the central ideas of the Conciliarists -- the right of appeal from pope to general council.*

The execrable and hitherto unknown abuse has grown up in our day, that certain persons, imbued with the spirit of rebellion and not from a desire to secure a better judgment, but to escape the punishment of some offence which they have committed, presume to appeal from the pope to a future council, in spite of the fact that the pope is the vicar of Jesus Christ and to him, in the person Peter, the following was said: "Feed my sheep" [John 21:16] and "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" [Matt. 16:18]. Wishing therefore to expel this pestiferous poison from the church of Christ and to care for the salvation of the fold entrusted to us, and to

remove every cause of offence from the fold of our Savior, with the advice and consent of our brothers, the cardinals of the holy Roman church, and of all the prelates, and of those who have been trained in the canon and civil law, who are at our court, and with our own sure knowledge, we condemn all such appeals and prohibit them as erroneous and detestable.

## **Martin Luther: Letter to the Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz** (October 31, 1517)

(3) Papal indulgences for the building of St. Peter's are circulating under your most distinguished name, and as regards them, I do not bring accusation against the outcries of the preachers, which I have not heard, so much as I grieve over the wholly false impressions which the people have conceived from them; to wit, -- the unhappy souls believe that if they have purchased letters of indulgence they are sure of their salvation; again, that so soon as they cast their contributions into the money-box, souls fly out of purgatory; furthermore, that these graces [i.e., the graces conferred in the indulgences] are so great that there is no sin too great to be absolved, even, as they say, if one had violated the Mother of God; again, that a man is free, through these indulgences, from all penalty and guilt.

(4) O God, most good! Thus souls committed to your care, good Father, are taught to their death, and the strict account, which you must render for all such, grows and increases. For this reason I have no longer been able to keep quiet about this matter, for it is by no gift of a bishop that man becomes sure of salvation, but the Apostle bids us always "work out our own salvation in fear and trembling." Finally, so narrow is the way that leads to life, that the Lord everywhere declares the difficulty of salvation. Why, then, do the preachers of pardons, by these false fables and promises, make the people careless and fearless? Whereas indulgences confer on us no good gift, either for salvation or for sanctity, but only take away the external penalty, which it was formerly the custom to impose according to the canons.

(5) Finally, works of piety and love are infinitely better than indulgences, and yet these are not preached with such ceremony or such zeal; nay, for the sake of preaching the indulgences they are kept quiet, though it is the first and the sole duty of all bishops that the people should learn the Gospel and the love of Christ, for Christ never taught that indulgences should be preached. How great then is the horror, how great the peril of a bishop, if he permits the Gospel to be kept quiet, and nothing but the noise of indulgences to be spread among his people! Will not Christ say to them, "straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel"?

May the Lord Jesus have your Most Reverend Fatherhood eternally in His keeping. Amen. From Wittenberg on the Vigil of All Saints, 1517. BROTHER MARTIN LUTHER.

## **The Ninety-Five Theses (Oct. 31, 1517)** Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences (1517)

Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be

present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter. In the Name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.
3. Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work diverse mortifications of the flesh.
5. The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment
12. In former times the canonical penalties were imposed not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ as do despair, almost-despair, and the assurance of safety.
17. With souls in purgatory it seems necessary that horror should grow less and love increase.
21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved.
23. If it is at all possible to grant to any one the remission of all penalties whatsoever, it is certain that this remission can be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to the very fewest.
24. It must be, therefore, that the greater part of the people are deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.
26. The pope does well when he grants remission to souls [in purgatory], not by the power of the keys (which he does not possess), but by way of intercession.
27. They preach man who say that so soon as the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out of purgatory.
30. No one is sure that his own contrition is sincere; much less that he has attained full remission.
32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon.
33. Men must be on their guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to Him.
34. For these "graces of pardon" concern only the penalties of sacramental satisfaction, and are appointed by man.
35. They preach no Christian doctrine who teach that contrition is not necessary in those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory.
42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend the buying of pardons to be compared in any way to works of mercy.
43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons.
45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives [his money] for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the pope, but the indignation of God.
48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting pardons, needs, and therefore desires, their devout prayer for him more than the money they bring.
50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the pardon-preachers, he would rather that St. Peter's church should go to ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that it would be the pope's wish and duty, to give of his own money to very many of those from whom

certain hawkers of pardons cajole money, even though the church of St. Peter might have to be sold.

53. They are enemies of Christ and of the pope, who bid the Word of God be altogether silent in some Churches, in order that pardons may be preached in others.
62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.
63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.
64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last first.
68. Indulgences are in truth the very smallest graces compared with the grace of God and piety of the Cross.
75. To think the papal pardons so great that they could absolve a man even if he had committed an impossible sin and violated the Mother of God -- this is madness.
76. We say, on the contrary, that the papal pardons are not able to remove the very least of venial sins, so far as its guilt is concerned.
81. This unbridled preaching of pardons makes it no easy matter, even for learned men, to rescue the reverence due to the pope from slander, or even from the shrewd questionings of the laity.
82. "Why does not the pope empty purgatory, for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a Church?"
83. Again: -- "Why are anniversary masses for the dead continued, and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded on their behalf, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"
86. Again: -- "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?"
91. If, therefore, pardons were preached according to the spirit and mind of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved; nay, they would not exist.
94. Christians are to be exhorted that they be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hell.
95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven rather through many tribulations, than through the assurance of peace.

### **Luther's Tower Experience (1519):** He Discovers the True Meaning of Righteousness

Meanwhile in that same year, 1519, I had begun interpreting the Psalms once again. I felt confident that I was now more experienced, since I had dealt in university courses with St. Paul's Letters to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the Letter to the Hebrews. I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: "The justice of God is revealed in it." I hated that word, "justice of God," which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active justice, as they call it, i.e., that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust.

But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, "Isn't it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap

sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his justice and his wrath?" This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant.

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.'" I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

I exalted this sweetest word of mine, "the justice of God," with as much love as before I had hated it with hate. This phrase of Paul was for me the very gate of paradise. Afterward I read Augustine's "On the Spirit and the Letter," in which I found what I had not dared hope for. I discovered that he too interpreted "the justice of God" in a similar way, namely, as that with which God clothes us when he justifies us. Although Augustine had said it imperfectly and did not explain in detail how God imputes justice to us, still it pleased me that he taught the justice of God by which we are justified.

### **Martin Luther's Definition of Faith:**

Excerpt from "An Introduction to Paul's Letter to the Romans," Luther's German Bible (1522)

Faith is not what some people think it is. Their human dream is a delusion. Because they observe that faith is not followed by good works or a better life, they fall into error, even though they speak and hear much about faith. "Faith is not enough," they say, "You must do good works, you must be pious to be saved." They think that, when you hear the gospel, you start working, creating by your own strength a thankful heart which says, "I believe." That is what they think true faith is. But, because this is a human idea, a dream, the heart never learns anything from it, so it does nothing and reform doesn't come from this "faith," either.

Instead, faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever. He stumbles around and looks for faith and good works, even though he does not know what faith or good works are. Yet he gossips and chatters about faith and good works with many words.

Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire! Therefore, watch out for your own false ideas and guard against good-for-nothing gossips, who

think they're smart enough to define faith and works, but really are the greatest of fools. Ask God to work faith in you, or you will remain forever without faith, no matter what you wish, say or can do.

## **Concerning Christian Liberty**

By Martin Luther (1520)

### Part 1: Letter of Martin Luther to Pope Leo X

Among those monstrous evils of this age with which I have now for three years been waging war, I am sometimes compelled to look to you and to call you to mind, most blessed father Leo. In truth, since you alone are everywhere considered as being the cause of my engaging in war, I cannot at any time fail to remember you; and although I have been compelled by the causeless raging of your impious flatterers against me to appeal from your seat to a future council -- fearless of the futile decrees of your predecessors Pius and Julius, who in their foolish tyranny prohibited such an action -- yet I have never been so alienated in feeling from your Blessedness as not to have sought with all my might, in diligent prayer and crying to God, all the best gifts for you and for your see.

Now, to confess the truth openly, I am conscious that, whenever I have had to mention your person, I have said nothing of you but what was honorable and good. I have called you Daniel in Babylon; and every reader thoroughly knows with what distinguished zeal I defended your conspicuous innocence. I am not delighted at the faults of any man, since I am very conscious myself of the great beam in my own eye, nor can I be the first to cast a stone at the adulteress.

Your see, however, which is called the Court of Rome, and which neither you nor any man can deny to be more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom, this I have verily abominated, and have felt indignant that the people of Christ should be cheated under your name and the pretext of the Church of Rome. For many years now, nothing else has overflowed from Rome into the world -- as you are not ignorant -- than the laying waste of goods, of bodies, and of souls, and the worst examples of all the worst things. These things are clearer than the light to all men; and the Church of Rome, formerly the most holy of all Churches, has become the most lawless den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the very kingdom of sin, death, and hell; so that not even antichrist, if he were to come, could devise any addition to its wickedness.

Meanwhile you, Leo, are sitting like a lamb, like Daniel in the midst of lions. It is all over with the Court of Rome; the wrath of God has come upon her to the uttermost. She hates councils; she dreads to be reformed; she cannot restrain the madness of her impiety. It had been your duty and that of your cardinals to apply a remedy to these evils, but this gout laughs at the physician's hand, and the chariot does not obey the reins. Under the influence of these feelings, I have always grieved that you, most excellent Leo, who were worthy of a better age, have been made pontiff in this. For the Roman Court is not worthy of you and those like you, but of Satan himself, who in truth is more the ruler in that Babylon than you are.

Moreover, I cannot bear with laws for the interpretation of the word of God, since the word of God, which teaches liberty in all other things, ought not to be bound. Saving these two things, there is nothing which I am not able, and most heartily willing, to do or to suffer. I hate contention; I will challenge no one; in return I wish not to be challenged; but, being challenged, I will not be dumb in the cause of Christ my Master.

Therefore, Leo, my Father, beware of listening to those sirens who make you out to be not simply a man, but partly a god, so that

you can command and require whatever you will. It will not happen so, nor will you prevail. You are the servant of servants, and more than any other man, in a most pitiable and perilous position. Let not those men deceive you who pretend that you are lord of the world; who babble of your having power over heaven, hell, and purgatory. These men are your enemies and are seeking your soul to destroy it. They are in error who raise you above councils and the universal Church; they are in error who attribute to you alone the right of interpreting Scripture.

(7) In fine, that I may not approach you empty-handed, blessed Father, I bring with me this little treatise, published under your name, as a good omen of the establishment of peace and of good hope. It is a small matter, if you look to its exterior, but, unless I mistake, it is a summary of the Christian life put together in small compass, if you apprehend its meaning. I, in my poverty, have no other present to make you, nor do you need anything else than to be enriched by a spiritual gift. I commend myself to your Paternity and Blessedness, whom may the Lord Jesus preserve forever. Amen.

## Part 2: Beginning of the Treatise on Christian Liberty

Now, though I cannot boast of my abundance, and though I know how poorly I am furnished, yet I hope that, after having been vexed by various temptations, I have attained some little drop of faith, and that I can speak of this matter, if not with more elegance, certainly with more solidity, than those literal and too subtle disputants who have hitherto discoursed upon it without understanding their own words. That I may open then an easier way for the ignorant -- for these alone I am trying to serve--I first lay down these two propositions, concerning spiritual liberty and servitude:

-- A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none.  
-- A Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.

Although these statements appear contradictory, yet, when they are found to agree together, they will make excellently for my purpose. They are both the statements of Paul himself, who says, "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all" (1 Cor. 9:19), and "Owe no man anything, but to love one another" (Rom. 13:8). Now love is by its own nature dutiful and obedient to the beloved object. Thus even Christ, though Lord of all things, was yet made of a woman; made under the law; at once free and a servant; at once in the form of God and in the form of a servant.

For the word of God cannot be received and honored by any works, but by faith alone. Therefore, when you begin to believe, you learn at the same time that all that is in you is utterly guilty, sinful, and damnable, according to that saying, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). When you have learnt this, you will know that Christ is necessary for you, since He has suffered and risen again for you, that, believing on Him, you might by this faith become another man, all your sins being remitted, and you being justified by the merits of another, namely of Christ alone. For if the touch of Christ was healing, how much more does that most tender spiritual touch, nay, absorption of the word, communicate to the soul all that belongs to the word! In this way therefore the soul, through faith alone, without works, is from the word of God justified, sanctified, endued with truth, peace, and liberty, and filled full with every good thing, and is truly made the child of God.

The third incomparable grace of faith is this: that it unites the soul to Christ, as the wife to the husband, by which mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul are made one flesh. Now if they are one flesh, and if a true marriage -- nay, by far the most perfect of

all marriages -- is accomplished between them (for human marriages are but feeble types of this one great marriage), then it follows that all they have becomes theirs in common, as well good things as evil things; so that whatsoever Christ possesses, that the believing soul may take to itself and boast of as its own, and whatever belongs to the soul, that Christ claims as His.

## Part 3: Conclusion of the Treatise

True, then, are these two sayings: "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works"; "Bad works do not make a bad man, but a bad man does bad works." Thus it is always necessary that the substance or person should be good before any good works can be done, and that good works should follow and proceed from a good person. As Christ says, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). We do not then reject good works; nay, we embrace them and teach them in the highest degree. It is not on their own account that we condemn them, but on account of this impious addition to them and the perverse notion of seeking justification by them.

Thus from faith flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a cheerful, willing, free spirit, disposed to serve our neighbor voluntarily, without taking any account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss. Its object is not to lay men under obligations, nor does it distinguish between friends and enemies, or look to gratitude or ingratitude, but most freely and willingly spends itself and its goods, whether it loses them through ingratitude, or gains goodwill. Therefore just as our neighbor is in want, and has need of our abundance, so we too in the sight of God were in want, and had need of His mercy. And as our heavenly Father has freely helped us in Christ, so ought we freely to help our neighbor by our body and works, and each should become to other a sort of Christ, so that we may be mutually Christs, and that the same Christ may be in all of us; that is, that we may be truly Christians.

The Blessed Virgin beyond all others, affords us an example of the same faith, in that she was purified according to the law of Moses, and like all other women, though she was bound by no such law and had no need of purification. Still she submitted to the law voluntarily and of free love, making herself like the rest of women, that she might not offend or throw contempt on them. She was not justified by doing this; but, being already justified, she did it freely and gratuitously. Thus ought our works too to be done, and not in order to be justified by them; for, being first justified by faith, we ought to do all our works freely and cheerfully for the sake of others.

Finally, there are very many persons who, when they hear of this liberty of faith, straightway turn it into an occasion of license. They think that everything is now lawful for them, and do not choose to show themselves free men and Christians in any other way than by their contempt and reprehension of ceremonies, of traditions, of human laws; as if they were Christians merely because they refuse to fast on stated days, or eat flesh when others fast, or omit the customary prayers; scoffing at the precepts of men, but utterly passing over all the rest that belongs to the Christian religion. Thus, though we ought boldly to resist those teachers of tradition, and though the laws of the pontiffs deserve sharp reproof, yet we must spare the timid crowd, who are held captive by the laws of those impious tyrants, till they are set free. Fight vigorously against the wolves, but on behalf of the sheep, not against the sheep. And this you may do by inveighing against the laws and lawgivers, and yet at the same time observing these laws with the weak, lest they be offended, until they shall themselves recognize the tyranny, and understand their own liberty.

# An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility of the German Nation:

Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate,  
by Martin Luther (1520)

## Translator's Introduction

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

It is a cry out of the heart of Germany, a nation whose bent is all religious, but which, from that very circumstance, is all the more open to the insults and wrongs and deceptions of the Roman curia. It shows, as does no other single work of the Reformation time, the things that were in men's minds and the variety of motives which led them to espouse the cause of the Protestant party. Doctrine, ethics, history, politics, economics, all have their place in the treatise. It is not only "a blast on the war-trumpet," but a connecting link between the thought of the Middle Ages and that of modern times, prophetic of the new age, but showing how closely the new is bound up with the old.

## Luther's Cover Letter

To His Most Illustrious & Mighty Imperial Majesty, and to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,  
Grace and power from God, Most Illustrious Majesty, and most gracious and dear Lords.

It is not out of sheer forwardness or rashness that I, a single, poor man, have undertaken to address your worships. The distress and oppression which weigh down all the Estates of Christendom, especially of Germany, and which move not me alone, but everyone to cry out time and again, and to pray for help, have forced me even now to cry aloud that God may inspire someone with His Spirit to lend this suffering nation a helping hand. In this whole matter the first and most important thing is that we take earnest heed not to enter on it trusting great might or in human reason, even though all power in the world were ours; for God cannot and will not suffer a good work to be begun with trust in our own power or reason. On this account, I fear, it came to pass of old that the good Emperors Frederick I and II and many other German emperors were shamefully oppressed and trodden under foot by the popes, although all the world feared them. It may be that they relied on their own might more than on God, and therefore they had to fall. In our own times, too, what was it that raised the bloodthirsty Pope Julius II to such heights? Nothing else, I fear, except that France, the Germans and Venice relied upon themselves.

## I. THE THREE WALLS OF THE ROMANISTS

The Romanists, with great adroitness, have built three walls about them, behind which they have hitherto defended themselves in such wise that no one has been able to reform them; and this has been the cause of terrible corruption throughout all Christendom. **First**, when pressed by the temporal power, they have made decrees and said that the temporal power has no jurisdiction over them, but, on the other hand, that the spiritual is above the temporal power. **Second**, when the attempt is made to prove them out of the Scriptures, they raise the objection that the interpretation of the Scriptures belongs to no one except the pope. **Third**, if threatened with a council, they answer with the fable that no one can call a council but the pope. So terribly do they fear for their skin in a really free council! Now God help us, and give us one of the trumpets with which the walls of Jericho were overthrown, that we may blow down these walls of straw and paper, and may set free the Christian rods for the punishment of sin, bringing to light the craft and deceit of the devil, to the end that through punishment we may reform ourselves, and once more attain God's favor.

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

Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom," and the book of Revelation says, Rev. 5:10 "Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings." Therefore when the bishop consecrates it is the same thing as if he, in the place and stead of the whole congregation, all of whom have like power, were to take one out of their number and charge him to use this power for the others.

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

See, now, how Christian is the decree which says that the temporal power is not above the "spiritual estate" and may not punish it. That is as much as to say that the hand shall lend no aid when the eye is suffering. Is it not unnatural, not to say unchristian, that one member should not help another and prevent its destruction? Verily, the more honorable the member, the more should the others help. I say then, since the temporal power is ordained of God to punish evil-doers and to protect them that do well, it should therefore be left free to perform its office without hindrance through the whole body of Christendom without respect of persons, whether it affect pope, bishops, priests, monks, nuns or anybody else.

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

The **second wall** is still more flimsy and worthless. They wish to be the only Masters of The Holy Scriptures, even though in all their lives they learn nothing from them. They assume for themselves sole authority, and with insolent juggling of words they would persuade us that the pope, whether he be a bad man or a good man, cannot err in matters of faith, and yet they cannot prove a single letter of it. For since they think that the Holy Spirit never leaves them, be they never so unlearned and wicked, they make bold to decree whatever they will. And if it were true, where would be the need or use of Holy Scriptures? Unless I had read it myself, I could not have believed that the devil would make such clumsy pretensions at Rome, and find a following.

Thus it may well happen that the pope and his followers are wicked men, and no true Christians, not taught of God, not having true understanding. On the other hand, an ordinary man may have true understanding; why then should we not follow him? Has not the pope erred many times? Who would help Christendom when the pope errs, if we were not to believe another, who had the Scriptures on his side, more than the pope? Therefore it is a wickedly invented fable, and they cannot produce a letter in defense of it, that the interpretation of Scripture or the confirmation of its interpretation belongs to the pope alone. They have themselves usurped this power; and although they allege that this power was given to Peter when the keys were given to him, it is plain enough that the keys were not given to Peter alone, but to the whole community. But Christ's word to Peter, (Luke 22:32) "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fall not," cannot be applied to the pope, since the majority of the popes have been without faith, as they must themselves confess. Besides, it is not only for Peter that Christ prayed, but also for all Apostles and Christians, as he says in John 17:20: "Father, I pray for those whom Thou hast given Me, and not for these only, but for all who believe on Me through their word." Is not this clear enough?

Only think of it yourself! They must confess that there are pious Christians among us, who have the true faith, Spirit, understanding, word and mind of Christ. Why, then, should we reject their word and understanding and follow the pope, who has neither faith nor Spirit? That would be to deny the whole faith and the Christian Church. Therefore it behooves every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to rebuke errors.

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

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

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

Therefore, when necessity demands, and the pope is an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a faithful member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council. No one can do this so well as the temporal authorities, especially since now they also are fellow-Christians, fellow-priests, "fellow-spirituals," fellow-lords over all things. Would it not be an unnatural thing, if a fire broke out in a city, and everybody were to stand by and it burn on and on and consume everything that could burn, for the sole reason that nobody had the authority of the burgomaster, or because, perhaps, the fire broke into the burgomaster's house? In such case is it not the duty of every citizen to arouse and call the rest? How much more should this be done in the spiritual city of Christ, if a fire of offense breaks out, whether in the papal government, or anywhere else?

## II. Abuses to Be Discussed in Councils

(15) We shall now look at the matters which should be discussed in the councils, and with which popes, cardinals, bishops and all the scholars ought properly to be occupied day and night if they loved Christ and His Church. But if they neglect this duty, then let the laity and the temporal authorities see to it, regardless of bans and thunders. Let us, therefore, awake, dear Germans, and fear God rather than men, that we may not share the fate of all the poor souls who are so lamentably lost through the shameful and devilish rule of the Romans, in which the devil daily takes a larger and larger place.

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

What is the use in Christendom of those people who are called the cardinals? I shall tell you. Italy and Germany have many rich monasteries, foundations, benefices, and livings. No better way has been discovered to bring all these to Rome than by creating cardinals and giving them the bishoprics, monasteries and prelacies, and so overthrowing the worship of God. Why? The cardinals must have the income. No Turk could have so devastated Italy and suppressed the worship of God. Now that Italy is sucked dry, they come into Germany, and begin oh, so gently. But let us beware, or Germany will soon become like Italy. I advise, however, that the number of the cardinals be reduced, or that the pope be made to keep them at his own expense. How comes it that we Germans must put up with such robbery and such extortion of our property, at the hands of the pope?

I believe that Germany now gives much more to the pope at Rome than it gave in former times to the emperors. Indeed, some estimate that every year more than three hundred thousand gulden find their way from Germany to Rome, quite uselessly and fruitlessly; we get nothing for it but scorn and contempt. And yet we wonder that princes, nobles, cities, endowments, land and people are impoverished! We should rather wonder that we still have anything to eat!

When they pretend that they are about to fight against the Turks, they send out emissaries to gather money. Oft-times they issue an indulgence on this same pretext of fighting the Turks, for they think the mad Germans are forever to remain utter and arrant fools, give them money without end, and satisfy their unspeakable greed. Now, in this matter the German nation, bishops and princes, should consider that they too are Christians, and should protect the people, whom they are set to rule and guard in things temporal and spiritual, against these ravaging wolves who, in sheep's clothing, pretend to be shepherds and rulers. Why should there be a pope in Christendom, if his power is used for nothing else than such arch-knavery, and if he protects and practices it? O noble princes and lords, how long will ye leave your lands and people naked to these ravaging wolves!

### Proposals for Reform: Part I

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

Every prince, nobleman and city should boldly forbid their subjects to pay the annates to Rome and should abolish them entirely; for the pope has broken the compact and made the annates a robbery, to the injury and shame of the whole German nation. It is therefore the duty of the temporal authorities to protect the innocent and prevent injustice.

The Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom, and should do this for the salvation of the poor souls who must go to ruin through his tyranny. They should ordain, order, and decree, that henceforth no benefice shall be drawn into the hands of Rome, and that hereafter no appointment shall be obtained there in any manner whatsoever; and they should restore to the ordinaries the right and office of ordering these benefices in the German nation as best they may. They would then take note at Rome that the Germans are not always mad and drunken, but that they have really become Christians, and intend to permit no longer the mockery and scorn of the holy name of Christ, under which all this knavery and destruction of souls goes on, but have more regard to God and His glory than to the authority of men.

The hard and terrible oaths should be abolished, which the bishops are wrongfully compelled to render to the pope, and by which they are bound like servants. It is not enough that they burden us in body, soul and property with their many mad laws, by which faith is weakened and Christendom ruined; but they seize upon the person and office and work of the bishops, and now upon the **investiture** also, which was in olden times the right of the German emperors.. On this point they had great wars and disputes with the emperors, until at last, with impudent authority, they took the right and have kept it until now; just as though the Germans, above all the Christians on earth, had to be the puppets of the pope and the Roman See and do and suffer what no one else will do and suffer.

Of the same sort is also that unheard-of lie about the "Donation of Constantine." It must have been some special plague of God that

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

The kissing of the pope's feet should take place no more. Compare the two -- Christ and the pope! Christ washed His disciples' feet and dried them, and the disciples never washed His feet. The pope, as though he were higher than Christ, turns things around and, as a great favor, allows people to kiss his feet, though he ought properly to use all his power to prevent it. It is another piece of the same scandalous pride, that the pope is not satisfied to ride or to be driven in a vehicle, but although he is strong and in good health, he has himself borne by men, with unheard-of splendor, like an idol. How, pray, does such satanic pride agree with the example of Christ, Who went on foot, as did all His disciples? Where has there ever been a worldly monarch who went about in such worldly glory as he who wishes to be the head of all those who are to despise and flee worldly glory, i.e., of Christians?

Wherefore I say that according to the institution of Christ and the Apostles every city should have a priest or bishop; and this priest should not be compelled to live without a wedded wife, but should be permitted to have one, as St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:2, "A bishop should be a man who is blameless, and the husband of but one wedded wife, whose children are obedient and virtuous," etc. So then we clearly learn from the Apostle that it should be the custom for every town to choose out of the congregation a learned and pious citizen, entrust to him the office of the ministry, and support him at the expense of the community, leaving him free choice to marry or not. He should have with him several priests or deacons, who might also be married or not, as they chose, to help him rule the people of the community by means of preaching and the sacraments, as is still the practice in the Greek Church.

In olden times, when there were so many persecutions and controversies with heretics, there were many holy fathers who of their own accord abstained from matrimony, to the end that they might the better devote themselves to study and be prepared at any time for death or for controversy. Then the Roman See interfered, out of sheer wantonness, and made a universal commandment forbidding priests to marry. This was done at the bidding of the devil. From this has arisen so much untold misery, occasion was given for the withdrawal of the Greek Church, and division, sin, shame and scandal were increased without end, - which is the result of everything the devil does.

### Proposals for Reform: Part II

All festivals should be abolished, and Sunday alone retained. If it were desired, however, to retain the festivals of Our Lady and of the greater saints, they should be transferred to Sunday, or observed only by a morning mass, after which all the rest of the day should be a working-day. The reason is this: The feast-days are now abused by drinking, gaming, idleness and all manner of sins, so that on the holy days we anger God more than on other days, and have altogether turned things around; the holy days are not holy and the working

days are holy, and not only is no service done to God and His saints by the many holy days, but rather great dishonor.

What spirit has given the pope the authority to canonize the saints? Who tells him whether they are saints or not? Are there not already sins enough on earth, that we too must tempt God, interfere in His judgment and set up the dear saints as lures for money? Therefore I advise that the saints be left to canonize themselves. Yea, it is God alone who should canonize them. For it is evident that through the canonizing of saints neither God's glory nor the improvement of Christians is sought, but only money and glory, in that one church wants to be something more and have something more than others, and would be sorry if another had the same thing and its advantage were common property.

### Proposals for Reform: Part III

Now when the pope could not subdue to his arrogant will the Greeks and the emperor at Constantinople, who was hereditary Roman Emperor, he bethought himself of this device, viz., to rob him of his empire and his title and turn it over to the Germans, who were at that time warlike and of good repute, so as to bring the power of the Roman Empire under his control and give it away as a fief. So too it turned out. It was taken away from the emperor at Constantinople and its name and title were given to us Germans. Thereby we became the servants of the pope, and there is now a second Roman Empire, which the pope has built upon the Germans; for the other, which was first, has long since fallen. So then the Roman See has its will. It has taken possession of Rome, driven out the German Emperor and bound him with oaths not to dwell at Rome. He is to be Roman Emperor, and yet he is not to have possession of Rome, and besides he is at all times to be dependent upon the caprice of the pope and his followers, so that we have the name and they have the land and cities.

I think too that I have pitched my song in a high key, have made many propositions which will be thought impossible and have attacked many things too sharply. But what am I to do? I am in duty bound to speak. If I were able, these are the things I should wish to do. I prefer the wrath of the world to the wrath of God; they can do no more than take my life.

## The Babylonian Captivity of the Church by Martin Luther (1520)

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church marks Luther's final and irreparable break with the Church of Rome. While *The Letter to the Christian Nobility*, addressed to the German nation as such, was written in the language of the people, *The Babylonian Captivity*, as is appropriate for a theological treatise, is composed in Latin. King Henry VIII of England wrote his *Assertions on the Seven Sacraments Against Martin Luther (1521)* in reply to *The Babylonian Captivity*, for which the King won from the pope the proud title of "Defender of the Faith."

Martin Luther, Augustinian, to his friend, Herman Tulich

Some two years ago I wrote a little book on indulgences, which I now deeply regret having published. For at the time I still clung to the Roman tyranny with great superstition and held that indulgences should not be altogether rejected, seeing they were approved by the common consent of men. Since then, however, through the kindness of the friars, who so strenuously defended indulgences, I have come to see that they are nothing but a fraud of

the Roman flatterers by which they rob people of their faith and fortunes. I wish I could convince the booksellers and all my readers to burn up the whole of my writings on indulgences and to substitute for them this proposition: indulgences are a Swindler's Trick of the Roman flatterers.

At the outset I must deny that there are seven sacraments, and hold for the present to but three — baptism, penance and the bread. These three have been subjected to a miserable captivity by the Roman curia, and the Church has been deprived of all her liberty.

### THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

Now, about the Sacrament of the Bread, the most important of all sacraments: If one kind may be withheld from the laity, then with equal right and reason a portion of baptism and penance might also be taken from them by this same authority of the Church. Therefore, just as baptism and absolution must be administered in their entirety, so the Sacrament of the Bread must be given in its entirety to all laymen, if they desire it. I am amazed to find them asserting that the priests may never receive only the one kind, in the mass, on pain of committing a mortal sin — that for no other reason, as they unanimously say, than that both kinds constitute the one complete sacrament, which may not be divided. I beg them to tell me why it may be divided in the case of the laity, and why to them alone the whole sacrament may not be given. How can the one kind be a complete sacrament for the laity and not a complete sacrament for the priests? Why do they flaunt the authority of the Church and the power of the pope in my face? These do not make void the Word of God and the testimony of the truth.

The **first captivity** of this sacrament, therefore, concerns its substance or completeness, of which we have been deprived by the despotism of Rome. The sacrament does not belong to the priests, but to all, and the priests are not lords but ministers, in duty bound to administer both kinds to those who desire them, and as often as they desire them.

The **second captivity** of this sacrament is less grievous so far as the conscience is concerned, yet the very gravest danger threatens the man who would attack it, to say nothing of condemning it. Here I shall be called a Wycliffite and a heretic a thousand times over. But what of that? Since the Roman bishop has ceased to be a bishop and become a tyrant, I fear none of his decrees, for I know that it is not in his power, nor even in that of a general council, to make new articles of faith. Years ago, when I was delving into scholastic theology, the Cardinal of Cambrai gave me food for thought, in his comments on the fourth *Book of the Sentences*, where he argues with great acumen that to hold that real bread and real wine, and not their accidents only, are present on the altar, is much more probable and requires fewer unnecessary miracles — if only the Church had not decreed otherwise. It is real bread and real wine, in which Christ's real flesh and blood are present, not otherwise and not less really than they assume to be the case under their accidents.

I therefore permit every man to hold either of these views (transubstantiation or consubstantiation), as he chooses. My one concern at present is to remove all scruples of conscience, so that no one may fear to become guilty of heresy if he should believe in the presence of real bread and real wine on the altar, and that every one may feel at liberty to ponder, hold and believe either one view or the other, without endangering his salvation. Moreover, the Church had the true faith for more than twelve hundred years, during which time the holy Fathers never once mentioned this transubstantiation — certainly, a monstrous word for a monstrous idea — until the pseudo-philosophy of Aristotle became rampant in the Church these last three hundred years. Perhaps they will say that the danger of

idolatry demands that bread and wine be not really present. How ridiculous!

(7) I rejoice greatly that the simple faith of this sacrament is still to be found at least among the common people. They do not understand, so they do not dispute, whether accidents are present or substance, but believe with a simple faith that Christ's body and blood are truly contained in whatever is there, and leave to those who have nothing else to do the business of disputing about that which contains them. Let us not, however, dabble too much in philosophy. For my part, if I cannot fathom how the bread is the body of Christ, I will take my reason captive to the obedience of Christ, and clinging simply to His word, firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ. What does it matter if philosophy cannot fathom this? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle.

Therefore it is with the sacrament even as it is with Christ. In order that divinity may dwell in Him, it is not necessary that the human nature be transubstantiated and divinity be contained under its accidents. But both natures are there in their entirety, and it is truly said, "This man is God," and "This God is man." Even though philosophy cannot grasp this, faith grasps it, and the authority of God's Word is greater than the grasp of our intellect. Even so, in order that the real body and the real blood of Christ may be present in the sacrament, it is not necessary that the bread and wine be transubstantiated and Christ be contained under their accidents, but both remain there together.

The **third captivity** of this sacrament is that most wicked abuse of all, in consequence of which there is today no more generally accepted and firmly believed opinion in the Church than this — that the mass is a good work and a sacrifice. This abuse has brought an endless host of others in its wake, so that the faith of this sacrament has become utterly extinct and the holy sacrament has truly been turned into a fair, tavern, and place of merchandise. Hence participations, brotherhoods, intercessions, merits, anniversaries, memorial days, and the like wares are bought and sold, traded and bartered in the Church, and from this priests and monks derive their whole living.

Therefore let this stand at the outset as our infallibly certain proposition — the mass, or Sacrament of the Altar, is Christ's testament which He left behind Him at His death, to be distributed among His believers. Let this truth stand, I say, as the immovable foundation on which we shall base all that we have to say, for we are going to overthrow, as you will see, all the godless opinions of men imported into this most precious sacrament. If the mass is a promise, as has been said, it is to be approached, not with any work, strength or merit, but with faith alone. For where there is the word of God Who makes the promise, there must be the faith of man who takes it.

The mass, according to its substance, is, therefore, nothing else than the words of Christ mentioned above — "Take and eat." It is as if He said: "Behold, condemned, sinful man, in the pure and unmerited love with which I love you, and by the will of the Father of all mercies, I promise you in these words, even though you do not desire or deserve them, the forgiveness of all your sins and life everlasting. And, so that you may be most certainly assured of this my irrevocable promise, I give my body and shed my blood, thus by my very death confirming this promise, and leaving my body and blood to you as a sign and memorial of this same promise." From this you will see that nothing else is needed to have a worthy mass than a faith that confidently relies on this promise, believes these words of Christ are true, and does not doubt that these infinite blessings have been bestowed upon it. Following closely behind this faith there follows, by itself, a most sweet stirring of the heart, by

which the spirit of man is enlarged — that is love, given by the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ — so that he is drawn to Christ, that gracious and good Testator, and made quite another and a new man. Who would not shed tears of gladness, no, nearly faint for the joy he has for Christ, if he believed with unshaken faith that this inestimable promise of Christ belonged to him!

Hence it is a manifest and wicked error to offer or apply masses for sins, for satisfactions, for the dead, or for any necessity whatsoever of one's own or of others. You will readily see the obvious truth of this if you but hold firmly that the mass is a divine promise, which can profit no one, be applied to no one, intercede for no one, and be communicated to no one, save him alone who believes with a faith of his own. Who can receive or apply, in behalf of another, the promise of God, which demands the personal faith of every individual? Can I give to another what God has promised, even if he does not believe? Can I believe for another, or cause another to believe? But this is what I must do if I am able to apply and communicate the mass to others. For there are but two things in the mass: the promise of God, and the faith of man which takes that which the promise offers. But if it is true that I can do this, then I can also hear and believe the Gospel for others, I can be baptized for another, I can be absolved from sins for another. Therefore, let this irrefutable truth stand fast. Where there is a divine promise everyone must stand upon his own feet, everyone's personal faith is demanded, everyone will give an account for himself and will bear his own burden.

But there is yet another stumbling-block that must be removed, and this is much greater and the most dangerous of all. It is the common belief that the mass is a sacrifice, which is offered to God. Even the words of the canon tend in this direction, when they speak of "these gifts," "these offerings," "this holy sacrifice," and farther on, of "this offering." Prayer also is made, in so many words, "that the sacrifice may be accepted even as the sacrifice of Abel," etc., and hence Christ is termed the "Sacrifice of the altar." In addition to this there are the sayings of the holy Fathers, the great number of examples, and the constant usage and custom of all the world.

We must resolutely oppose all of this, firmly entrenched as it is, with the words and example of Christ. For unless we hold fast to the truth, that the mass is the promise or testament of Christ, as the words clearly say, we shall lose the whole Gospel and all our comfort. For there is nothing said of a work or a sacrifice. Moreover, we have also the example of Christ on our side. For at the Last Supper, when He instituted this sacrament and established this testament, Christ did not offer Himself to God the Father, nor did He perform a good work on behalf of others, but He set this testament before each of them that sat at table with Him and offered him the sign. Therefore, as distributing a testament, or accepting a promise, differs diametrically from offering a sacrifice, so it is a contradiction in terms to call the mass a sacrifice. The former is something that we receive, while the latter is something that we offer.

## THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Satan, though he could not quench the power of baptism in little children, nevertheless succeeded in quenching it in all adults, so that scarcely anyone calls to mind their baptism and still fewer glory in it. So many other ways have they discovered of ridding themselves of their sins and of reaching heaven. The source of these false opinions is that dangerous saying of St. Jerome's — either unhappily phrased or wrongly interpreted — which he terms penance "the second plank" after the shipwreck, as if baptism were not penance. Accordingly, when men fall into sin, they despair of "the first plank," which is the ship, as though it had gone under, and fasten all their faith on the second plank, that is, penance. This has

produced those endless burdens of vows, religious works, satisfactions, pilgrimages, indulgences, and sects, from this has arisen that flood of books, questions, opinions and human traditions, which the world cannot contain.

Therefore a penitent will gain much by laying hold of the memory of his baptism above all else, confidently calling to mind the promise of God, which he has forsaken. He should plead it with His Lord, rejoicing that he is baptized and therefore is yet within the fortress of salvation. He should detest his wicked ingratitude in falling away from its faith and truth. His soul will find wondrous comfort, and will be encouraged to hope for mercy, when he considers that the divine promise which God made to him and which cannot possibly lie, still stands unbroken and unchanged, yes, unchangeable by any sins. See, how rich therefore is a Christian, the one who is baptized! Even if he wants to, he cannot lose his salvation, however much he sin, unless he will not believe. For no sin can condemn him save unbelief alone. But as for contrition, confession of sins, and satisfaction — along with all those carefully thought out exercises of men — if you turn your attention to them and neglect this truth of God, they will suddenly fail you and leave you more wretched than before. For whatever is done without faith in the truth of God, is vanity of vanities.

Perhaps someone will oppose what I have said by pointing to the baptism of infants. Infants do not understand God's promise and cannot have baptismal faith. So either faith is not necessary or else infant baptism is useless. Here I say what everyone says: the faith of others, namely, the faith of those who bring them to baptism aids infants. For the Word of God is powerful, when it is uttered. It can change even a godless heart, which is no less unresponsive and helpless than any infant. Even so the infant is changed, cleansed and renewed by faith poured into it, through the prayer of the Church that presents it for baptism and believes. We read in the Gospel of the paralytic, who was healed through the faith of others. Is there any obstacle that the faith of the Church and the prayer of faith cannot remove?

One thing I will add — and I wish I could persuade everyone to do it! — namely, to completely abolish or avoid all the making of vows, whether they are vows to enter religious orders, to make pilgrimages or to do any works whatsoever. Then we could remain in the freedom of our baptism, which is the most religious, rich in works, state of all. It is impossible to say how greatly that widespread delusion of vows weakens baptism and obscures the knowledge of Christian liberty. Vows should be abolished by a general edict, especially life-long vows, and all men diligently recalled to the vows of baptism. Let no one retort by pointing to Sts. Bernard, Francis, Dominic and others, who founded or fostered monastic orders. It is certain that none of them was saved through his vows and his "religious" life; they were saved through faith alone, by which all men are saved.

Therefore I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood — no, I dissuade everyone — unless he be forearmed with this knowledge and understand that the works of monks and priests, be they never so holy and arduous, differ no whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic toiling in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before Him by faith alone. No, he should know that the menial housework of a maidservant or manservant is often times more acceptable to God than all the fastings and other works of a monk or a priest, because the latter lacks faith. Since, therefore, vows seem to tend nowadays only to the glorification of works and to pride, it is to be feared that there is nowhere less of faith and of the Church than among the priests, monks and bishops, and that these men are in truth heathen or hypocrites, who imagine themselves to be the

Church or the heart of the Church, and "spiritual," and the Church's leaders, when they are everything else but that.

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

We come in the third place to the sacrament of penance. Three parts have they made of penance, — contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

Let us first take up confession. There is no doubt that confession is necessary and commanded of God. Thus we read in Matthew 3:6 -- "They were baptized of John in Jordan, confessing their sins." And in 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." But most effectually of all does Matthew 18:15 prove the institution of confession, in which passage Christ teaches that a sinning brother should be rebuked, haled before the Church, accused, and, if he will not hear, excommunicated. But he hears when, heeding the rebuke, he acknowledges and confesses his sin.

Of private confession, which is now observed, I am hearty in favor, even though it cannot be proved from the Scriptures; it is useful and necessary, nor would I have it abolished — no, I rejoice that it exists in the Church of Christ, for it is a cure without an equal for distressed consciences. For when we have laid bare our conscience to our brother and privately made known to him the evil that lurked within, we receive from our brother's lips the word of comfort spoken by God Himself; and, if we accept it in faith, we find peace in the mercy of God speaking to us through our brother. This alone do I abominate, — that this confession has been subjected to the despotism and extortion of the pontiffs.

Hence, I have no doubt but that everyone is absolved from his hidden sins when he has made confession, either of his own accord or after being rebuked, has sought pardon and amended his ways, privately before any brother, however much the violence of the pontiffs may rage against it; for Christ has given to everyone of His believers the power to absolve even open sins. We have proof of this in Christ's words in Matthew 18:18 -- "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." For this is said to each and every Christian. Let the Pope, therefore, permit all brothers and sisters freely to hear the confession of hidden sins, so that the sinner may make his sins known to whomever he will and seek pardon and comfort, that is, the word of Christ, by the mouth of his neighbor.

## CONFIRMATION

I wonder what could have possessed them to make a sacrament of confirmation out of the laying on of hands, which Christ employed when He blessed young children, and the apostles when they imparted the Holy Spirit, ordained elders and cured the sick. I do not say this because I condemn the seven sacraments, but because I deny that they can be proved from the Scriptures. Would to God we had in the Church such a laying on of hands as there was in apostolic times, whether we called it confirmation or healing! But there is nothing left of it now but what we ourselves have invented to adorn the office of the bishops, that they may have at least something to do in the Church. For after they relinquished to their inferiors those arduous sacraments together with the Word, as being too common for themselves, it was no more than right that we should discover something easy and not too burdensome for such delicate and great heroes to do, and should by no means entrust it to the lower clergy as something common. For a bishop who does not

preach the Gospel or care for souls, what is he but an idol in the world, having but the name and appearance of a bishop?

But we seek, instead of this, sacraments that have been divinely instituted, among which we see no reason for numbering confirmation. For, in order that there be a sacrament, there is required above all things a word of divine promise, whereby faith, may be trained. But we read nowhere that Christ ever gave a promise concerning confirmation, although He laid hands on many and included the laying on of hands among the signs in Mark 16:18 "They shall lay their hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Yet no one referred this to a sacrament, nor can this be done. Hence it is sufficient to regard confirmation as a certain churchly rite or sacramental ceremony, similar to other ceremonies.

## CONCLUSION

Herewith I conclude this prelude, and freely and gladly offer it to all pious souls who desire to know the genuine sense of the Scriptures and the proper use of the sacraments. I hear a rumor of new bulls and papal curses sent out against me, in which I am urged to recant or be declared a heretic. If that is true, I desire this book to be a portion of the recantation I shall make; so that these tyrants may not complain of having had their pains for nothing. The remainder I will publish ere long, and it will, please Christ, be such as the Roman See has hitherto neither seen nor heard. I shall give ample proof of my obedience. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Exsurge Domine,

#### Bull of Pope Leo X issued June 15, 1520 condemning Martin Luther

(1) Arise, O Lord, and judge your own cause. Remember your reproaches to those who are filled with foolishness all through the day. Listen to our prayers, for foxes have arisen seeking to destroy the vineyard whose winepress you alone have trod. When you were about to ascend to your Father, you committed the care, rule, and administration of the vineyard, an image of the triumphant church, to Peter, as the head and your vicar and his successors. The wild boar from the forest seeks to destroy it and every wild beast feeds upon it. Let the whole church of the saints and the rest of the universal church arise. Some, putting aside her true interpretation of Sacred Scripture, are blinded in mind by the father of lies. Wise in their own eyes, according to the ancient practice of heretics, they interpret these same Scriptures otherwise than the Holy Spirit demands, inspired only by their own sense of ambition, and for the sake of popular acclaim, as the Apostle declares. In fact, they twist and adulterate the Scriptures.

(2) These errors have, at the suggestion of the human race, been revived and recently propagated among the more frivolous and the illustrious German nation. We grieve the more that this happened there because we and our predecessors have always held this nation in the bosom of our affection. For after the empire had been transferred by the Roman Church from the Greeks to these same Germans, our predecessors and we always took the Church's advocates and defenders from among them. Indeed it is certain that these Germans, truly germane to the Catholic faith, have always been the bitterest opponents of heresies, as witnessed by those commendable constitutions of the German emperors in behalf of the Church's independence, freedom, and the expulsion and extermination of all heretics from Germany. In virtue of our pastoral office committed to us by the divine favor we can under no circumstances tolerate or overlook any longer the pernicious poison

of the above errors without disgrace to the Christian religion and injury to orthodox faith.

(3)

By the authority of almighty God, the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and our own authority, we condemn, reprobate, and reject completely each of these theses or errors as either heretical, scandalous, false, offensive to pious ears or seductive of simple minds, and against Catholic truth. Moreover, we likewise condemn, reprobate, and reject completely the books and all the writings and sermons of the said Martin, containing the said errors or any one of them; and we wish them to be regarded as utterly condemned, reprobated, and rejected. We forbid each and every one of the faithful of either sex, in virtue of holy obedience and under the above penalties to be incurred automatically, to read, assert, preach, praise, print, publish, or defend them.

(4) As far as Martin himself is concerned, O good God, what have we overlooked or not done? What fatherly charity have we omitted that we might call him back from such errors? For after we had cited him, wishing to deal more kindly with him, we urged him through various conferences with our legate and through our personal letters to abandon these errors. We have even offered him safe conduct and the money necessary for the journey urging him to come without fear or any misgivings, which perfect charity should cast out, and to talk not secretly but openly and face to face after the example of our Savior and the Apostle Paul. If he had done this, we are certain he would have changed in heart, and he would have recognized his errors. Yet, with the advice of our brothers, imitating the mercy of almighty God who does not wish the death of a sinner but rather that he be converted and live, and forgetting all the injuries inflicted on us and the Apostolic See, we have decided to use all the compassion we are capable of. It is our hope, so far as in us lies, that he will experience a change of heart by taking the road of mildness we have proposed, return, and turn away from his errors. We will receive him kindly as the prodigal son returning to the embrace of the Church.