

The Smalcald Articles

Editors' Introduction to the Smalcald Articles

Although Martin Luther, at the Leipzig Disputation in 1519, already had called into question the doctrinal authority and competence of general councils of the church, he had appealed his case to a general council. For most of the fifteenth century the papacy had striven to reverse the decrees made at the Council of Constance, which placed conciliar authority on the level of papal authority. The Fifth Lateran Council, meeting in 1511–12, had been securely under papal control. Pope Leo X had little interest in the need for reform and failed to take seriously the “monk’s quarrel” in Germany; his successor, Adrian VI, came from the reform-minded circles around Erasmus in the Netherlands, but his brief rule of twenty months (1522–23) afforded him no chance to overcome objections within the Curia to serious reform efforts. His successor, the Medici Clement VII, was not able to organize reform, and thus Pope Paul III was faced with the pressing need to do so when he ascended the papal throne in 1534. In June 1536 he called for a general council to meet in Mantua in May 1537, and launched a diplomatic offensive to bring German princes and their theologians to that council. International and ecclesiastical politics delayed the council’s opening until December 1545, when it was convened in the episcopal city of Trent, south of the Alps but still a part of the Holy Roman Empire.

Although he felt it pointless to attend such a papal council, the Saxon elector, John Frederick, had long wanted Luther to compose a doctrinal “last will and testament,” a clear statement of his positions on the critical issues of the time. The closing section of Luther’s *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528) had presented such a statement, but in this new situation the elector wanted another similar confession of faith from the reformer. At the same time he recognized that such a document could be a useful summary of the Lutheran position for submission to the papal council, and so on 11 December 1536, he commissioned Luther to assemble a group of theologians, similar to the group assembled in 1530 to draft a memorandum for use at the Diet of Augsburg. This group was to assist the ailing Luther in writing a summary statement of the Evangelical confession. Nicholas von Amsdorf, John Agricola, George Spalatin, and his Wittenberg colleagues Philip Melancthon, Justus Jonas, Caspar Cruciger Sr., and John Bugenhagen assembled at the Black Cloister in Wittenberg at the end of December to serve as a sounding board for the composition of what became “The Smalcald Articles.”

In contrast to the overview of his theology that served as the conclusion of his 1528 *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper*, which arranged his teaching according to the outline of the Creed, the Smalcald Articles began with a confession of ancient trinitarian doctrine, on which both the papal party and the Lutherans publicly agreed. The second section of the document confessed Luther’s teaching on what he viewed as the heart of the biblical message: Christ’s

atonement work and the concept of trust, topics on which he saw no hope of agreement because of the Roman position on the Mass and related abuses (including the doctrines of purgatory, pilgrimages, relics, and the invocation of saints), on monastic life, and on the papacy. A third section treated a series of doctrinal topics on which Luther hoped that theologians could find common formulations of biblical truths. The document was structured to present Luther's teaching to the council.

Written records suggest that some sharp disagreement took place while his colleagues discussed Luther's draft. Particularly on the Lord's Supper the group struggled to arrive at the simple confession that "the bread and the wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ." The group suggested some changes, including the addition of the section on the invocation of the saints (II, 2) and material in II, 2, 26–28.

The Smalcald Articles were presented to the Lutheran princes in February 1537, at the meeting of the defensive league they had organized in Smalcald in 1531. They decided to use the Augsburg Confession and its Apology as the basis of their presentation at the council rather than Luther's Articles. Melancthon had expressed his reservations regarding the suitability of the Articles as a public confession. Most of the assembled theologians, however, did subscribe to the document, accepting it as their confession. Luther wrote a preface outlining his program for reform the following year (1538), and the Articles were printed, with a translation of Melancthon's "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope" attached. This revision also added certain sections to three articles (II, 2, 5, 13–15; III, 3, 42–45; III, 8, 3–13). In 1544 the Smalcald Articles were accepted in parts of Hesse as a defining confession of the church, alongside the Augsburg Confession. During the 1550s the Articles were used increasingly, particularly among the "Gnesio-Lutheran" theologians, as an authoritative confessional document, and they appeared in a number of *corpora doctrinae* in the following two decades. Thus, it was natural that the Articles be included in the Book of Concord.

The Smalcald Articles

ARTICLES OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE,

which were to have been presented by our side at the council in Mantua—or wherever else it was to have met—and which were to indicate what we could or could not accept or give up, etc. Written by Doctor Martin Luther in the year 1537.

The Preface of Doctor Martin Luther¹

Pope Paul III called a council to meet at Mantua last year around Pentecost.² Afterward he moved it from Mantua, so that it is still not known where he intends to hold it, or whether he can hold it.³ We on our side had to prepare for the eventuality that, whether summoned to the council or not, we would be condemned. I was therefore instructed⁴ to compose and assemble articles of our teaching in case it came to negotiations about what and how far we would or could compromise with the papists, and in which things we definitely intended to persist and remain firm.

Consequently, I assembled these articles and submitted them to our side.⁵ They were also accepted and unanimously confessed by us, and it was resolved that they should be publicly submitted and presented as the confession of our faith—should the pope and his adherents ever become so bold as to convene a truly free council in a serious and genuine spirit, without deception and treachery,⁶ as would be his duty.

But the Roman court is so dreadfully afraid of a free council and so shamefully flees from the light that it has deprived even those who are on the pope's side of the hope that he will ever

1 As a prefatory comment to his own manuscript of the SA, Luther wrote this sentence in Latin on the cover: "In these articles there is sufficient teaching for the life of the church. Otherwise, in political and economic matters, there is sufficient law to which we are bound, so that beyond these burdens there is no need to fashion others. For we are warned, 'Today's trouble is enough for today' [Matt. 6:34*]." This was not copied by Spalatin nor included in any subsequent versions of SA. The reconstruction here is based on "Die schmalkaldischen Artikel," ed. Helmar Junghans, in *Martin Luther: Studienausgabe*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Delius (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1992), 5:350, except reading *nexemur* ("we are warned") for *nixemur* ("we rely upon"). The following preface was added to the printed version in 1538 and hence is italicized.

2 Paul III published the council bull, *Ad dominici gregis curam*, on 2 June 1536. Pentecost in 1537 fell on May 20.

3 In 1538, when Luther wrote the preface and published SA, the council had already been postponed twice and did not meet until December 1545 at Trent.

4 John Frederick gave Luther this assignment on 11 December 1536. (See John Frederick's letter to the theologians at Wittenberg, WABr 7:613f.) The bulk of the SA was written during the next two weeks.

5 Compare to Ep, Rule and Guiding Principle, 4. It is not clear whether Luther here refers to a December 1536 gathering of select theologians at Wittenberg or to the provincial diet at Schmalkalden in February 1537.

6 CA, Preface, 21, and *Call of Dr. Martin Luther for a Council* (1518/1520) (WA 2:34–50/WA 7:74–90; cf. LW 48:90, 171, 185).

tolerate a free council, much less actually convene one. They are understandably greatly offended and are quite troubled when they observe that the pope would rather see all of Christendom lost and every soul damned than to allow himself or his followers to be reformed even a little and to permit limits on his tyranny.

Therefore I still wanted to publicize these articles through the public press, in case (as I fully expect and hope) I should die before a council could take place. (For the scoundrels, who flee from the light and avoid the day, are taking such great pains to postpone and hinder the council.) I wanted to do this so that those who live and remain after me will have my testimony and confession to present, in addition to the confession that I have already published.⁷ I have held fast to this confession until now and, by God's grace, I will continue to hold to it.

What should I say? Why should I complain? I am still alive—every day I write, preach, and teach. Yet there are such poisonous people, not only among our adversaries, but also unfaithful associates,⁸ who want to be on our side and who dare to use my writings and teaching directly against me. They let me look on and listen, even though they know that I teach otherwise. They want to conceal their poison under my work and mislead the poor people by using my name. What will happen in the future after my death?⁹

I suppose I should respond to everything while I am still living. But then again, how can I alone stop all the mouths of the devil, especially those (for they are all poisoned) who do not want to listen or pay attention to what we write? Instead, they devote all their energy to one thing: how they might shamefully twist and corrupt our words down to the very letters. I will let the devil (or ultimately God's wrath) answer them as they deserve. I often think of the good Gerson,¹⁰ who doubted whether one should make good writings public. If one does not, then many souls that could have been saved are neglected. But if one does, then the devil is there with innumerable vile, evil mouths that poison and distort everything so that it bears no fruit. Still, what they gain is seen in the light of day. For although they so shamelessly slandered us and wanted to keep the people on their side with their lies, God has continually furthered his work, has made their number less and less, while our number grows larger and larger, and has allowed and continues to allow them and their lies to come to naught.

7 *Confession concerning Christ's Supper* (1528) (WA 26:499–509; LW 37:360–72).

8 Literally, “false brothers” (cf. Gal. 2:4*). Luther may be thinking of John Agricola, with whom he was locked in struggle over the role of the law in the Christian's life.

9 SA III, 15, 3, and *Confession concerning Christ's Supper*, especially pt. III (1528) (WA 26:500–502; LW 37:361–62).

10 John Gerson in his *De laude scriptorum* XI.

I must tell a story. A learned doctor,¹¹ who came to Wittenberg from France, stated publicly in our presence that his king was persuaded beyond the shadow of a doubt that there was no church, no government, and no marriage among us, but rather that everyone carried on with each other like cattle, and all did what they wanted. Now imagine, how will those people, who in their writings have represented as pure truth such gross lies to the king and to other countries, face us on that day before the judgment seat of Christ? Christ the Lord and Judge of us all knows quite well that they lie and have lied. They will have to hear his judgment; that I know for sure. May God bring to repentance those who can be converted. For the rest, there will be eternal suffering and woe.

To return to the subject: I would indeed very much like to see a true council, in order to assist with a variety of matters and to aid many people. Not that we need it, for through God's grace our churches are now enlightened and supplied with the pure Word and right use of the sacraments, an understanding of the various walks of life, and true works. Therefore we do not ask for a council for our sakes. In such matters, we cannot hope for or expect any improvement from the council. Rather, we see in bishoprics everywhere so many parishes empty and deserted¹² that our hearts are ready to break. And yet, neither bishops nor cathedral canons ask how the poor people live or die—people for whom Christ died. And should not these people hear this same Christ speak to them as the true shepherd with his sheep?¹³ It horrifies and frightens me that Christ might cause a council of angels to descend upon Germany and totally destroy us all, like Sodom and Gomorrah, because we mock him so blasphemously with the council.¹⁴

In addition to such necessary concerns of the church, there are also countless important matters in worldly affairs that need improvement. There is disunity among the princes and the estates. Greed and usury have burst in like a great flood and have attained a semblance of legality. Wantonness, lewdness, extravagant dress, gluttony, gambling, conspicuous consumption with all kinds of vice and wickedness, disobedience—of subjects, servants, laborers—extortion by all the artisans and the peasants¹⁵ (who can list everything?) have so gained the upper hand that a person could not set things right again with ten councils and twenty imperial diets. If participants in the council were to deal with the chief concerns in the spiritual and secular estates that are opposed to God, then their hands would be so full that they would forget all about the child's games and fool's play of long robes, great tonsures,¹⁶ broad cinctures, bishop's

11 Gervasius Waim, who was trained under John Eck and was a legate for Francis I of France, came to Saxony in 1531. See Luther's letter to Elector John Frederick, dated around 9 February 1537 (WABr 8:36; LW 50:160).

12 In 1538 it was reported in Wittenberg that there were some six hundred vacant parishes in the bishopric of Würzburg (WATR 4, no. 4002; LW 54:308).

13 John 10:3*. SA III, 12, 2.

14 The Latin translation: "pretext of a council." For the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, see Genesis 19.

15 LC, "Ten Commandments," 226 and 235.

16 The distinctive haircut worn by medieval monks.

and cardinal's hats, crosiers, and similar clowning around. If we had already been following God's command and precept in the spiritual and secular estates, then we would have found the spare time to reform food, vestments, tonsures, and chasubles. But if we swallow such camels and strain out gnats or let logs stand and dispute about specks,¹⁷ then we might just as well be satisfied with such a council.

I, therefore, have provided only a few articles, because in any case we already have received from God so many mandates to carry out in the church, in the government, and in the home that we can never fulfill them. What is the point, what is the use of making so many decretals and regulations in the council, especially if no one honors or observes the chief things commanded by God? It is as if God had to honor our buffoonery while in return we trample his solemn commands underfoot. In fact, our sins burden us and prevent God from being gracious to us, because we do not even repent and moreover want to defend every abomination.

O dear Lord Jesus Christ, hold a council of your own and redeem your people through your glorious return! The pope and his people are lost. They do not want you. Help us who are poor and miserable, who sigh to you and earnestly seek you, according to the grace you have given us through your Holy Spirit, who with you and the Father lives and reigns, forever praised. Amen.

[I.]

The First Part of the Articles deals with the lofty articles of the divine Majesty, namely:

1. That Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons in one divine essence and nature, is one God, who created heaven and earth, etc.¹⁸

2. That the Father was begotten by no one, the Son was begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.¹⁹

3. That neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son, became a human being.

4. That the Son became a human being in this way: he was conceived by the Holy Spirit without male participation and was born of the pure, holy Virgin Mary.²⁰ After that, he suffered, died, was buried, descended into hell, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, is seated at the

¹⁷ Matthew 23:24* and 7:3–5*.

¹⁸ Luther is paraphrasing the Nicene Creed.

¹⁹ Cf. the Athanasian Creed.

²⁰ The Latin translation reads: "always virgin."

right hand of God, in the future will come to judge the living and the dead, etc., as the Apostles' and the Athanasian Creeds and the common children's catechism teach.²¹

These articles are not matters of dispute or conflict, for both sides confess them. Therefore it is not necessary to deal with them at greater length now.

[II.]

The Second Part is about the articles that pertain to the office and work of Jesus Christ, or to our redemption.

Here is the first and chief article:

That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, “was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” (Rom. 4[:25*]); and he alone is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1[:29*]); and “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53[:6*]); furthermore, “All have sinned,” and “they are now justified without merit²² by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . . by his blood” (Rom. 3[:23–25*]).

²¹ Luther is using the word “teach” to refer to basic Christian instruction: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. See his comments on this material in the SC, “Creed,” 3–4; LC, “Creed,” 25–33.

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²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

[Romans 4:25 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

[John 1:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[Isaiah 53:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

Now because this must be believed and may not be obtained or grasped otherwise with any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us,²³ as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:28*, 26*]: “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law”; and also, “that God alone²⁴ is righteous and justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up,²⁵ even if heaven and earth or whatever is transitory passed away. As St. Peter says in Acts 4[:12*]: “There is no other name . . . given among mortals by which we must be saved.” “And by his bruises we are healed” (Isa. 53[:5*]).

22 Both Luther’s translation of the Bible and the NRSV read: “as a gift.”

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²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;

²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;

[Romans 3:23–25 \(NRSV\)](#)

23 SA III, 13, 1. *On Translating: An Open Letter* (1530) (WA 30/2: 632–33, 636–37, 639–44; LW 35:181ff., 187f., 193–99).

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²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

[Romans 3:28 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁶ it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

[Romans 3:26 \(NRSV\)](#)

24 Luther’s translation of the Bible and the NRSV read “himself.”

25 The Latin translation adds: “no believer can . . . permit anything contrary to it.”

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On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise everything is lost, and the pope and the devil and whatever opposes us will gain victory and be proved right.

The Second Article:²⁶

That the Mass under the papacy²⁷ has to be the greatest and most terrible abomination, as it directly and violently opposes this chief article. In spite of this, it has been the supreme and most precious of all the various papal idolatries. For it is held that this sacrifice or work of the Mass (even when performed by a rotten scoundrel) delivers people from sin both here in this life and beyond in purgatory, even though the Lamb of God alone should and must do this, as mentioned above. Nothing is to be conceded or compromised in this article either, because the first article does not allow it.

And wherever there might be reasonable papists, a person would want to speak with them in a friendly way like this: “Why do you cling so tenaciously to the Mass?”²⁸

1. After all, it is nothing but a mere human invention, not commanded by God. And we may discard all human inventions, as Christ says in Matthew 15[:9*]: “In vain do they worship me with human precepts.”

¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

[Acts 4:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

[Isaiah 53:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

²⁶ According to Luther’s understanding, what follows (SA II, 2–4) is connected directly to the office and work of Christ because it detracts from or replaces the biblical soteriology he outlined in SA II, 1, and because, as in the early church, teaching a doctrine correctly always entails condemnation of false doctrines that oppose it.

²⁷ Here Luther is not referring to the Lord’s Supper but to the sacrifice of the Mass and the liturgy and practices that had grown up around it.

²⁸ What follows reflects Luther’s five objections in this imaginary conversation.

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2. It is an unnecessary thing that you can easily omit without sin or danger.

3. You can receive the sacrament in a much better and more blessed way (indeed, it is the only blessed way), when you receive it according to Christ's institution. Why do you want to force the world into misery and destitution for the sake of unnecessary fabrications—especially when the sacrament can be had in another better and more blessed way?

Let it be publicly preached to the people that the Mass, as a human trifle, may be discontinued without sin and that no one will be damned who does not observe it but may in fact be saved in a better way without the Mass. What do you want to bet that the Mass falls of its own accord, not only among the mad mob but also among all upright, Christian, reasonable, and God-fearing hearts? How much more would this be the case were they to hear that the Mass is a dangerous thing, fabricated and invented without God's Word and will?²⁹

4. Because such innumerable, unspeakable abuses have arisen throughout the whole world with the buying and selling of Masses, they should properly be abandoned (if only to curb such abuses), even if in and of themselves Masses did contain something useful and good. How much the more should they be abandoned in order to guard forever against such abuses, since the Masses are completely unnecessary, useless, and dangerous, and everything can be had in a more necessary, useful, and certain manner without the Mass.

5. As the canon of the Mass and all the handbooks say,³⁰ the Mass is and can be nothing but a human work (even a work of rotten scoundrels), performed in order that individuals might reconcile themselves and others to God, acquire the forgiveness of sins, and merit grace. (When the Mass is observed in the very best possible way, it is observed with these intentions. What purpose would it otherwise have?) Thus the Mass should and must be condemned and repudiated, because it is directly contrary to the chief article, which says that it is not an evil or devout servant of the Mass with his work, but rather the Lamb of God and the Son of God, who takes away our sin [John 1:29*].

⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' ”

[Matthew 15:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

²⁹ This paragraph was added to the printed version of 1538.

³⁰ For example, William Durandus in his *Rationale divinarum officiorum* IV, 35, 12, states, “It has been passed down that Pope Gelasius, the fiftieth Primate since Saint Peter, first ordained in the canon . . .” For Luther's comments on the canon of the Mass, see *The Abomination of the Secret Mass* (1525) (WA 18:22–36; LW 36:311–28).

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²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

If some want to justify their position by saying that they want to commune themselves for the sake of their own devotion, they cannot be taken seriously. For if they seriously desire to commune, then they do so with certainty and in the best way by using the sacrament administered according to Christ's institution. On the contrary, to commune oneself is a human notion, uncertain, unnecessary, and even forbidden. Such people also do not know what they are doing, because they are following a false human notion and innovation without the sanction of God's Word. Thus it is not right (even if everything else were otherwise in order) to use the common sacrament of the church for one's own devotional life and to play with it according to one's own pleasure apart from God's Word and outside the church community.

This article on the Mass will be the decisive issue in the council because, were it possible for them to give in to us on every other article, they could not give in on this one. As Campeggio said at Augsburg, he would sooner allow himself to be torn to pieces before he would abandon the Mass.³¹ In the same way I, too, with God's help, would sooner allow myself to be burned to ashes before I would allow a servant of the Mass (whether good or evil) and his work to be equal to or greater than my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thus we are and remain eternally divided and opposed to one another. They are well aware that if the Mass falls, the papacy falls. Before they would allow that to happen, they would kill us all, if they could do it.

Besides all this, this dragon's tail,³² the Mass, has produced many noxious maggots and the excrement of various idolatries:

First, purgatory. Here they "traded" in purgatory, with Masses for the dead and vigils after seven days, thirty days, and a year,³³ and, finally, with the Common Week,³⁴ All Souls' Day,³⁵ and Soul Baths,³⁶ so that the Mass is only used on behalf of the dead, although Christ instituted

[John 1:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

31 Lorenzo Campeggio, the papal legate at Augsburg. Luther mentions this event a number of times, for example in *Dr. Martin Luther's Warning to His Dear German People* (1531) (WA 30/3: 311, 23–37; LW 47:45), and in a Table Talk, recorded 12 December 1536 (WATR 3, no. 3502; LW 54:215–16).

32 Revelation 12:3*; 20:2*. Cf. *The Keys* (1530) (WA 30/2: 506; LW 40:376).

33 The celebration of the Mass on the eve of the anniversary of the deceased is mentioned as early as Tertullian in *The Chaplet, or De Corona* 3 (MPL 2:79; ANF 3:94), and celebrations on the week or month following death are mentioned by Ambrose in "On the Death of Theodosius," 3 (MPL 16:1386; *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose*, trans. Leo P. McCauley et al., The Fathers of the Church 22 [New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953], 308).

34 The week following St. Michael's Day (29 September), when many Masses were offered for the dead.

35 2 November, when all the souls of the departed (as opposed to all the [unknown] saints, who were prayed for on 1 November) were commemorated.

36 Free baths endowed for the poor in the hope that they would pray for the donors' salvation.

the sacrament only for the living. Purgatory, therefore, with all its pomp, requiem Masses, and transactions, is to be regarded as an apparition of the devil. For it, too, is against the chief article that Christ alone (and not human works) is to help souls. Besides, concerning the dead we have received neither command nor instruction.³⁷ For these reasons, it may be best to abandon it, even if it were neither error nor idolatry.

At this point, the papists cite Augustine³⁸ and some of the Fathers, who have supposedly written about purgatory. They suppose that we do not see why and how they use such passages. St. Augustine does not write that there is a purgatory and cites no passage of Scripture that persuades him to adopt such a position. Instead, he leaves it undecided whether there is a purgatory or not and says simply that his mother asked to be remembered at the altar, or sacrament.³⁹ Now all of this is nothing but the human opinions of a few individuals, who can establish no article of faith (something God alone can do). But our papists employ such human words in order to make people believe in their shameful, blasphemous, accursed Masses offered up into purgatory for the souls of the dead, etc. They will never prove such a thing from Augustine. When they have given up their purgatorial “Mass Masses” (something Augustine never dreamed of), then we will discuss with them whether St. Augustine’s word, lacking support from Scripture, may be tolerated and whether the dead may be commemorated at the sacrament. It will not do to formulate articles of faith on the basis of the holy Fathers’ works or words. Otherwise, their food, clothes, houses, etc., would also have to be articles of faith—as has been done with relics. This means that⁴⁰ the Word of God—and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith.⁴¹

Second, as a result of their teaching on the Mass, evil spirits have caused much rascality, and, appearing as souls of the departed,⁴² they have demanded Masses, vigils, pilgrimages, and other alms with unspeakable lies and cunning. We all had to hold these matters as articles of faith and live according to them. The pope confirms this along with the Mass and all the other horrors. Here, too, there is no room for compromise or concession.

37 *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528) (WA 26:508, 6–12; LW 37:369).

38 Augustine, *City of God* XXI, 24 (MPL 41:738; CSEL 40/2: 559; NPNF, ser. 1, 2:470), and *Enchiridion* 67–69 (MPL 40:263–65; NPNF, ser. 1, 3:260).

39 *Confessions* IX, 11, 27, and IX, 13, 36 (MPL 32:775, 778–80; CSEL 33:219, 223, 225; NPNF, ser. 1, 1:138, 141).

40 The Latin translation reads: “We have a different rule, namely, that . . .”

41 Galatians 1:8*. SA II, 2, 13–15 was not a part of Luther’s original manuscript or of the copy made by Spalatin and subscribed to at Smalcald in 1537. Luther inserted this paragraph into the text for the SA’s publication in 1538.

42 Luther apparently refers here to the reports of apparitions mentioned by Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV, 40 (in *Saint Gregory the Great: Dialogues*, The Fathers of the Church 40 [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1959]), and Peter Damian, *Opusculum* 34, 5 (MPL 145:578f.).

Third, pilgrimages. Masses, the forgiveness of sins, and God's grace were also sought here, for the Mass ruled everything. Now, it is certain that, lacking God's Word, such pilgrimages are neither commanded nor necessary. For we can have forgiveness and grace in a much better way and can omit pilgrimages without any sin or danger. Why would one neglect one's own parish, God's Word, spouse and child, etc.—which are necessary and commanded—and run after unnecessary, uncertain, shameful, devilish will-o'-the-wisps? Only because the devil has driven the pope into praising and confirming such practices, so that the people routinely deserted Christ for their own works and (worst of all!) became idolatrous. Apart from the fact that they are unnecessary, uncommanded, unwise, uncertain, and even harmful. Therefore here, too, there is nothing to concede or give up, etc. Let it be preached that it is unnecessary as well as dangerous, and then see where pilgrimages stand.⁴³

Fourth, fraternities.⁴⁴ The monasteries, foundations, and lower clergy have assigned and conveyed to themselves (by lawful and open sale) all Masses, good works, etc., for both the living and the dead. They are not only purely human trifles, lacking God's Word, completely unnecessary, and not commanded, but they are also contrary to the first article of redemption, and therefore they can in no way be tolerated.

Fifth, relics. Here so many open lies and foolishness are based on the bones of dogs and horses. Because of such shenanigans—at which even the devil laughs—they should have long ago been condemned, even if there were something good in them. In addition, they lack God's Word, being neither commanded nor advised, and are a completely unnecessary and useless thing. The worst part is that relics, like the Mass, etc., were also to have produced an indulgence and the forgiveness of sin as a good work and act of worship.

Sixth, those precious indulgences belong here, which are given (for money, of course) to both the living and the dead. The accursed Judas, or pope, sells the merits of Christ together with the superabundant merits of all the saints and the entire church, etc. All of this is not to be tolerated, not only because it is without God's Word, not necessary, and not commanded, but because it is contrary to the first article. Christ's merit is not acquired through our work or pennies, but through faith by grace, without any money and merit—not by the authority of the pope, but rather by preaching a sermon, that is, God's Word.

Concerning the Invocation of Saints

The invocation of saints is also one of the abuses of the Antichrist that is in conflict with the first, chief article and that destroys the knowledge of Christ. It is neither commanded nor

43 The Latin translation adds: "For in this way they will spontaneously perish."

44 Since the eighth century members of certain monasteries obligated themselves to offer prayers and perform works of piety for their deceased brothers. In the late Middle Ages similar obligations were assumed by groups called *fraternities*, comprised of members of the clergy and/or the laity.

recommended, has no precedent in the Scripture, and—even if it were a precious possession, which it is not—we have everything a thousand times better in Christ.

Although the angels in heaven pray for us (as Christ himself also does), and in the same way also the saints on earth and perhaps those in heaven pray for us, it does not follow from this that we ought to invoke angels and saints; pray to them; keep fasts and hold festivals for them; celebrate Masses, make sacrifices, establish churches, altars, or worship services for them; serve them in still other ways; and consider them as helpers in time of need, assign all kinds of assistance to them, and attribute a specific function to particular saints, as the papists teach and do.⁴⁵ This is idolatry. Such honor belongs to God alone. As a Christian and saint on earth, you can pray for me, not only in one kind of need but in all necessities. However, on account of that, I ought not pray to you, invoke you, hold a festival, keep a fast, make a sacrifice, perform a Mass in your honor, and put my faith in you for salvation. There are other good ways I can honor, love, and thank you in Christ. Now if such idolatrous honor is taken away from the angels and dead saints, then the honor that remains will do no harm and will indeed soon be forgotten. When physical and spiritual benefit and help are no longer expected, then the saints will be left in peace, both in the grave and in heaven. For no one will long remember, esteem, or honor them simply out of love with no hope of return.⁴⁶

In summary, we cannot tolerate and must condemn what the Mass is, what has resulted from it, and what is connected to it, so that we may retain the holy sacrament in purity and with certainty and may use and receive it with faith according to the institution of Christ.

The Third Article:

That foundations⁴⁷ and monasteries, established in former times with good intentions for the education of learned people and decent women, should be returned to such use so that we may have pastors, preachers, and other servants of the church, as well as other people necessary for earthly government in cities and states, and also well-trained young women to head households and manage them.⁴⁸ Where they are not willing to serve in this way, it is better if they were abandoned or torn down than that they—with their blasphemous worship, devised by human beings—should be regarded as something better than everyday Christian walks of life and the offices and orders established by God. For all of this, too, is contrary to the first and chief article concerning redemption in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they (like all other human inventions) are

45 Luther discussed this in *On Translating: An Open Letter* (1530) (WA 30/2: 643, 14–645, 12; LW 35:198–200).

46 Par. 26–28 were drafted at the conference of theologians, held in Wittenberg at the end of 1536.

47 Also called chapters. They were associations of secular priests, called canons, especially in cathedral churches. For example, prior to 1527 some members of the University of Wittenberg faculty were members of the All Saints' Foundation.

48 See *To the Councilmen . . . That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524) (WA 15:27–53; LW 45:339–78).

also not commanded, not necessary, not useful—while causing dangerous and futile effort besides. The prophets call such worship *aven*, which means “wasted effort.”⁴⁹

The Fourth Article:

That the pope is not the head of all Christendom “by divine right”⁵⁰ or on the basis of God’s Word,⁵¹ because that belongs only to the one who is called Jesus Christ.⁵² Instead, the pope is only bishop, or pastor, of the church at Rome and of those who willingly or through a human institution (that is, through secular authority) have joined themselves to him in order to be Christians alongside him as a brother and companion but not under him as a lord—as the ancient councils⁵³ and the time of St. Cyprian⁵⁴ demonstrate. But now, however, no bishop dares to call the pope “brother,” as at that time, but instead must address him as his “most gracious lord,” as if he were a king or emperor. We will not, should not, and cannot impose this upon our consciences. But whoever wants to do so does it without our support.

It follows from this that everything the pope has undertaken and done on the basis of such false, offensive, blasphemous, arrogant power was and still is a purely diabolical affair and business, which corrupts the entire holy Christian church (however much it depends on him) and negates the first, chief article on redemption by Jesus Christ. (The only exception concerns the area of political government, where God sometimes allows much good to come to a people through a tyrant or scoundrel.)

All his bulls and books are available, in which he roars like a lion (the angel of Revelation 12 [10:3*] indicates this) that Christians cannot be saved unless they are obedient and submit to him

49 The Hebrew word *aven* literally means “wickedness,” “emptiness,” “vanity,” “futility.” Luther translated it *Mühe*, which properly means “effort,” “trouble,” “labor,” “pain.” In a marginal note on Isaiah 29:20* in the German Bible, he connected *Mühe* with the prophet’s denunciation of “false teaching and works.” See also his *Lectures on Habakkuk* (3:7) (1525) (WA 13:444, 18–28; LW 19:140) and *Lectures on Isaiah* (29:20) (1527–30) (WA 31/2: 181, 4–7; LW 16:249).

50 Luther uses the technical term, *de iure divino*.

51 Tr 12.

52 Ephesians 1:22*; 4:15*; 5:23*; Colossians 1:18*.

53 For example, the Councils of Nicea (*a.d.* 325), Constantinople (*a.d.* 381), Ephesus (*a.d.* 431), and Chalcedon (*a.d.* 451). Canon IV of the Council of Nicea stipulates that bishops should be elected by their own churches in the presence of one or more neighboring bishops.

54 Cf. Tr 14. Cyprian, as bishop of Carthage, addressed Pope Cornelius as his “very dear brother.” See, for example, his *Epistles*, XL–XLII, XLIV, XLVI, XLVIII, LIII, LIV, LVI (*MPL* 3:700, 703, 708, 710, 725, 731, 796, 830; *CSEL* 3/2: 597, 599, 605, 606, 614, 616, 666, 691; *ANF* 5:319–22, 324–25, 336, 338, 351).

in all things—what he wills, what he says, what he does.⁵⁵ This is as much to say: “Even if you believe in Christ and have everything that is necessary for salvation in him, nevertheless it is nothing and all in vain unless you consider me your god and are subject and obedient to me.” Yet, it is obvious that the holy church was without a pope for over five hundred years at least,⁵⁶ and even today the Greek church and many churches that use other languages have never been under the pope and still are not. Thus, as has often been said, it is a human fiction. It is not commanded. There is no need for it. And it is useless. The holy Christian church can survive quite well without such a head. It would have been much better off if such a head had not been raised up by the devil. The papacy is not necessary in the church, because it exercises no Christian office, and thus the church must continue and endure without the pope.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the pope wanted to renounce his claim; suppose that he were not the supreme head of the church “by divine right,” that is, by God’s command. Suppose instead, in order that the unity of Christendom might be better preserved against sects and heretics, that there must be a head to whom all others adhere. Now such a head would be elected by the people, and it would remain incumbent upon their power and choice whether to change or depose this head. This is virtually the way the council at Constance handled the popes, deposing three⁵⁷ and electing the fourth. Now just suppose, I say, that the pope and the see of Rome relinquished their authority and accepted this view (which, of course, is impossible because he would have to suffer the overthrow and destruction of his entire government and position with all his laws and books; in short, he cannot do it).

Even if he could, Christianity would not be helped in any way, and there would be even more sects than before, because they would not have to submit to such a head on the basis of God’s command but rather as a matter of human good will. He would rather easily and quickly be despised, until finally he would not have even one adherent. He would also no longer have to reside in Rome or at some other set place,⁵⁸ but wherever and in whatever church God provided a man suitable for the position. Oh, that would be a complicated and disorganized state of affairs!

³ he gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. And when he shouted, the seven thunders sounded.

[Revelation 10:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁵⁵ An extreme medieval papal claim for such authority was expressed in the 1302 bull, *Unam Sanctam*, of Boniface VIII: “We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff.”

⁵⁶ Luther thought that Gregory I was the last bishop of Rome prior to the rise of the papacy per se. See Tr 19.

⁵⁷ John XXIII was deposed at Constance on 29 May 1415. Gregory XII abdicated on 4 July 1415. Benedict XIII was deposed on 26 July 1415. Martin V was elected pope on 11 November 1417.

⁵⁸ The papal residence had been at Avignon, France, from 1309 to 1377.

Therefore the church cannot be better ruled and preserved than if we all live under one head, Christ, and all the bishops—equal according to the office (although they may be unequal in their gifts)⁵⁹—keep diligently together in unity of teaching, faith, sacraments, prayers, and works of love, etc. So St. Jerome writes that the priests at Alexandria ruled the churches together in common, as the apostles also did and afterward all bishops throughout Christendom,⁶⁰ until the pope elevated himself over them all.

This business shows overwhelmingly that he is the true end-times Antichrist,⁶¹ who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, because the pope will not let Christians be saved without his authority (which amounts to nothing, since it is not ordered or commanded by God). This is precisely what St. Paul calls “setting oneself over God and against God.”⁶² Neither the Turks nor the Tartars, despite being great enemies of the Christians, do any such thing. They allow whoever desires it to have faith in Christ, and they receive physical tribute and obedience from the Christians.

The pope, however, will not allow faith, but asserts instead that anyone who is obedient to him will be saved. We are unwilling to do this, even if we have to die in God’s name on account of it. All of this stems from his claim to be head of the Christian church⁶³ “by divine right.” Therefore he had to set himself up as equal to and even greater than Christ and let himself be praised first as the head of the church, then as its lord, and finally as lord of the entire world and nothing short of an earthly god—until he even dared to command the angels in heaven.⁶⁴

When the pope’s teaching is distinguished from that of the Holy Scriptures or compared to them, it turns out that the pope’s teaching—at its very best—is taken from the imperial, pagan law⁶⁵ and teaches about secular dealings and judgments, as his *Decretals*⁶⁶ show. Beyond this, it

59 1 Corinthians 12:4*, 8–10*; Romans 12:6–8*.

60 Luther refers to two passages from Jerome, which he employs in other contexts as well (e.g., in *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* [1533] [WA 38:237, 22; LW 38:196]). The citations of Jerome are from his Commentary on the Epistle to Titus 1:5*, 6* (MPL 26:562); and Epistle 146 (to Euangelus the Presbyter; MPL 22:1194; CSEL 66:310; NPNF, ser. 2, 6:288–89).

61 Luther uses two terms here: *Endchrist* (the “Christ” who comes in the end times) and *Widerchrist* (the Antichrist).

62 2 Thessalonians 2:4*.

63 Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 21, chap. 3, and dist. 22, chaps. 1–2.

64 Luther is referring to what is now generally held to be a spurious bull, *Ad memoriam reducendo*, ascribed to Pope Clement VI, which commanded the angels “to lead to heaven the souls of the pilgrims who might die on their way to Rome” during the jubilee year of 1350.

65 That is, Roman law.

66 Encyclical pronouncements of the popes.

gives instruction about ceremonies involving churches, vestments, foods, personnel, along with child's play, imaginary work, and fool's work without limit. But in all these things, there is absolutely nothing about Christ, faith, and God's commandments.

Finally, that the pope in contradiction to God promotes his lies about Masses, purgatory, monastic life, one's own works, and worship (which are the essence of the papacy) is nothing but the devil through and through. He damns, slays, and plagues all Christians who do not exalt and honor his abominations above all things. Therefore, as little as we can worship the devil himself as our lord or god, so we cannot allow his apostle, the pope or Antichrist, to govern as our head or lord. His papal government is characterized by lying and murder and the eternal ruin of body and soul, as I have demonstrated in many books.⁶⁷

These four articles will furnish them with enough to condemn at the council. They neither can nor will concede to us the tiniest fraction of these articles. Of this we may be certain, and we must rely upon the hope that Christ our Lord has attacked his enemies and will carry the day, both by his Spirit and at his return.⁶⁸ Amen.

At the council, we will not stand (as at Augsburg)⁶⁹ before the emperor or the secular authority, which issued a most gracious summons⁷⁰ and allowed the matters to be heard in a fair manner. We will stand before the pope and the devil himself, who does not intend to listen but only to damn us on the spot, to murder us, and to force us into idolatry. Therefore here we must not kiss his feet⁷¹ or say, "You are my gracious lord." Rather, we ought to speak as the angel spoke to the devil in Zechariah [3:2*], "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan!"

67 *Explanations of the 95 Theses* (1518) (WA 1:571, 10–22; LW 31:152); *Proceedings at Augsburg* (1518) (WA 2:19, 28–20, 35; LW 41:281); *The Leipzig Debate* (1519) (WA 2:161; LW 31:318); *On the Papacy at Rome* (1520) (WA 6:285–324; LW 39:55–104); *To the Christian Nobility* (1520) (WA 6:415, 19–416, 16; LW 44:139–40); *Concerning Rebaptism* (1528) (WA 26:152, 15–153, 17; LW 40:237–39); *The Keys* (1530) (WA 30/2: 487, 25–492, 20; LW 40:353–59).

68 2 Thessalonians 2:8*.

69 The imperial diet held at Augsburg in the summer of 1530 when the Augsburg Confession was presented to Emperor Charles V.

70 Charles V's proclamation for the Diet of Augsburg, dated 21 January 1530, included these words: "to listen to, understand, and consider each belief, opinion, and viewpoint between us in love and kindness, so that we might come to Christian truth." See *Dr. Martin Luther's Warning to His Dear German People* (1531) (WA 30/3: 287, 6–21; 291, 20–33; LW 47:24f., 30).

71 A required act of homage (*adoratio*) to the pope in the Middle Ages. See *To the Christian Nobility* (1520) (WA 6:435–36; LW 44:168).

[III.] The Third Part of the Articles

We could discuss the following matters or articles with learned, reasonable people or among ourselves. The pope and his kingdom do not value these things very much, because the conscience⁷² means nothing to them; money, honor, and power mean everything.

[1:]⁷³ Concerning Sin

Here we must confess (as St. Paul says in Rom. 5[:12*]) that sin comes from that one human being, Adam, through whose disobedience all people became sinners and subject to death and the devil. This is called the original sin,⁷⁴ or the chief sin.

The fruits of this sin are the subsequent evil works, which are forbidden in the Ten Commandments, such as unbelief, false belief, idolatry, being without the fear of God, presumption, despair, blindness, and, in short, not knowing or honoring God. Beyond that, there is lying, swearing [falsely] by God's name,⁷⁵ not praying or calling on God's name, neglect of God's Word, being disobedient to parents, murdering, behaving promiscuously, stealing, deceiving, etc.

This inherited sin has caused such a deep, evil corruption of nature that reason does not comprehend it; rather, it must be believed on the basis of the revelation in the Scriptures (Ps. 51[:5*] and Rom. 5[:12*]; Exod. 33[:20*]; Gen. 3[:6ff*.]). Therefore, the scholastic theologians have taught pure error and blindness against this article:

² And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?"

[Zechariah 3:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁷² Luther uses a Latin word, *conscientia*.

⁷³ The 1580 Book of Concord supplies numbers for the articles in Part III.

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¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—

[Romans 5:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁷⁴ German: *Erbsonde*, inherited sin.

⁷⁵ See SC, "Ten Commandments," 4, and the note there.

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1. That after the fall of Adam the natural powers of the human being have remained whole and uncorrupted, and that each human being possesses by nature sound reason and a good will, as the philosophers teach.

2. That the human being has a free will, either to do good and reject evil or to reject good and do evil.

3. That the human being is able, by using natural powers, to keep and carry out every command of God.

4. That human beings are able, using natural powers, to love God above all things and their neighbors as themselves.⁷⁶

5. That if human beings do as much as is in their power, then God will certainly give grace to them.⁷⁷

⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

[Psalm 51:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—

[Romans 5:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.”

[Exodus 33:20 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

[Genesis 3:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

76 E.g., John Duns Scotus, *Commentary on the Sentences* III, d. 27, q. 1, and Gabriel Biel, *Collectorium* III, d. 27, q. 1, a. 3, dub. 2.

6. That if someone wants to go to the sacrament, it is not necessary to have a proper intention to do good, but it is enough for that person not to have an evil intention to commit sin,⁷⁸ because human nature is so completely good and the sacrament is so powerful.

7. That there is no basis in Scripture that the Holy Spirit with his grace is necessary for performing a good work.

These and many similar things have arisen from a lack of understanding and ignorance about both sin and Christ our Savior. We cannot tolerate these purely pagan teachings, because, if these teachings were right, then Christ has died in vain.⁷⁹ For there would be no defect or sin in humankind for which he had to die—or else he would have died only for the body and not for the soul, because the soul would be healthy and only the body would be subject to death.

[2:] Concerning the Law

Here we maintain that the law was given by God, in the first place, to curb sin by means of the threat and terror of punishment and also by means of the promise and offer of grace and favor. All of this failed because of the evil that sin worked in humankind. Some, who are enemies of the law because it prohibits what they want to do and commands what they do not want to do, became worse because of it. On account of this, insofar as they are not restrained by punishment, they act against the law even more than before. These are the coarse, evil people who do evil whenever they have an opportunity. Others become blind and presumptuous, imagining that they can and do keep the law by their own powers (as has just been said above about the scholastic theologians).⁸⁰ This attitude produces hypocrites and false saints.

The foremost office or power of the law is that it reveals inherited sin and its fruits. It shows human beings into what utter depths their nature has fallen and how completely corrupt it is. The law must say to them that they neither have nor respect any god or that they worship foreign gods. This is something that they would not have believed before without the law. Thus they are terrified, humbled, despondent, and despairing. They anxiously desire help but do not know where to find it; they start to become enemies of God, to murmur,⁸¹ etc. This is what is meant by

77 E.g., Gabriel Biel, *Collectorium* III, d. 27, q. 1, a. 3, dub. 2. Here Luther paraphrases the medieval nostrum, *facere quod in se est* (to do what is in one).

78 In the 1520 papal bull of excommunication, *Exsurge, Domine*, Luther was condemned for rejecting this. See his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* (1521) (WA 7:316, 6–329, 7; LW 32:12–19). See also SA III, 3, 17, and the note there.

79 Galatians 2:21*.

80 SA III, 1, 6–10.

81 Rom. 5:10*; Exod. 16:8*; Luke 15:2*; 19:7*.

Romans [4:15*]: “The law brings wrath,”⁸² and Romans 5[:20*], “Sin becomes greater through the law.”

[3:] Concerning Repentance⁸³

The New Testament retains this office of the law and teaches it, as Paul does and says, in Romans 1[:18*]: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all” people. Also Romans 3[:19–20*]: “So that . . . the whole world may be held accountable to God” and “no human being

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¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

Romans 4:15 (NRSV)

82 Luther mistakenly refers to Romans 3.

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²⁰ But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Romans 5:20 (NRSV)

83 The German phrase, *Buße tun* (Latin: *poenitentiam agere*), may be translated “do penance,” “repent,” or “be penitent,” depending on the context. In this paragraph and throughout this article Luther is playing on these various meanings. Compare *The Explanation of the Ninety-five Theses* (1518) (WA 1:529–33; LW 31:83–88).

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¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

Romans 1:18 (NRSV)

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¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

²⁰ For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:19–20 (NRSV)

will be justified in his sight”; and Christ says in John 16[:8*]: the Holy Spirit “will convict the world of sin.”⁸⁴

Now this is the thunderbolt of God, by means of which he destroys both the open sinner and the false saint⁸⁵ and allows no one to be right but drives the whole lot of them into terror and despair. This is the hammer of which Jeremiah speaks: “My word is a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces” [Jer. 23:29*]. This is not “active contrition,”⁸⁶ a contrived remorse, but “passive contrition,”⁸⁷ true affliction of the heart, suffering, and the pain of death.

This is really what it means to begin true repentance. Here a person must listen to a judgment such as this: “You are all of no account—whether you appear publicly to be sinners or saints.”⁸⁸ You must all become something different from what you are now and act in a different way, no matter who you are now and what you do. You may be as great, wise, powerful, and holy as you could want, but here no one is righteous, etc.”⁸⁹

To this office of the law, however, the New Testament immediately adds the consoling promise of grace through the gospel. This we should believe. As Christ says in Mark 1[:15*]:

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⁸ And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:

[John 16:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

84 The alternate reading in the NRSV.

85 Cf. SA III, 2, 2–3.

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²⁹ Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

[Jeremiah 23:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

86 Luther uses a Latin phrase, *activa contritio*.

87 Luther uses a Latin phrase, *passiva contritio*.

88 The Latin translation adds: “in your own opinion.”

89 Romans 3:10–12*. See also SA III, 3, 33.

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¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

“Repent, and believe in the good news.” This is the same as, “Become and act otherwise, and believe my promise.” Even before Jesus, John the Baptizer was called a preacher of repentance—but for the purpose of the forgiveness of sins. That is, John was to convict them all and turn them into sinners, so that they would know how they stood before God and would recognize themselves as lost people. In this way they were to be prepared for the Lord⁹⁰ to receive grace, to await and accept from him forgiveness of sins. Jesus himself says in Luke 24[:47*]: “You must preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name to the whole world.”⁹¹

But where the law exercises such an office alone, without the addition of the gospel, there is⁹² death and hell, and the human creature must despair, like Saul and Judas. As St. Paul says: “The law kills through sin.”⁹³ Moreover, the gospel does not give consolation and forgiveness in only one way—but rather through the Word, sacraments, and the like (as we shall hear),⁹⁴ so that with God there is truly rich redemption from the great prison of sin (as Ps. 130[:7–8*] says).

[Mark 1:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

90 Cf. Mark 1:3*.

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⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

[Luke 24:47 \(NRSV\)](#)

91 A paraphrase.

92 The Latin translation: “nothing else but.”

93 Cf. Romans 7:10*; for Saul, see 1 Samuel 28:20* and 31:4*; for Judas, see Matthew 27:3–5*. Cf. Ap XII, 8.

94 SA III, 4.

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⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

[Psalm 130:7–8 \(NRSV\)](#)

Now we must compare the false penance of the sophists⁹⁵ with true repentance, in order that they both might be better understood.

*Concerning the False Penance of the Papists*⁹⁶

It was impossible for them to teach correctly about penance, because they do not recognize what sin really is. As mentioned above,⁹⁷ they do not hold the correct position about original sin at all. Instead they say that the natural powers of humankind have remained whole and uncorrupted; that reason can teach correctly and the will can rightly act according to it; that God surely gives his grace if human beings do as much as is in their power, according to human free will.

From this it must follow that they only do penance for actual sins, such as evil thoughts to which they consent (because evil impulses, lusts, and inclinations were not sin), evil words, and evil works (which the free will could well have avoided).

They divide such penance into three parts⁹⁸—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—with this comfort and pledge: that the person who is truly contrite, goes to confession, and makes satisfaction by these actions merits forgiveness and pays for sins before God. In this way, they directed the people who come to penance to place confidence in their own works. From this came the phrase that was spoken from the pulpit when they recited the general confession on behalf of the people: “Spare my life, Lord God, until I do penance and improve my life.”⁹⁹ Here there was no Christ. Nothing was mentioned about faith, but instead people hoped to overcome and blot out sin before God with their own works. We also became priests and monks with this intention: we wanted to set ourselves against sin.

Contrition was handled in this way: Because no one could recall every sin (particularly those committed during an entire year),¹⁰⁰ they resorted to the following loophole.¹⁰¹ If unknown sins

95 Scholastic theologians.

96 Cf. Ap XII, 98–178.

97 This paragraph summarizes SA III, 1, 4–11.

98 This division of the sacrament of penance is found already in Peter Lombard, *Sentences* IV, d. 16, c. 1. Luther discusses these three parts of penance in what follows (SA III, 3, 15–21).

99 This phrase, or its equivalent, dates back to at least the tenth century and was spoken by the pastor, in behalf of the congregation, at the conclusion of the sermon.

100 At the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), it was stipulated that all who had reached the age of discretion (seven years) must confess their sins to a priest at least once a year.

101 Luther uses an idiom, which, translated literally, is, “they mended the coat” or “patched the hide” (*flickten sie den Pelz*).

were remembered later, then a person was also to be contrite for them and confess them, etc. Meanwhile, they were commended to God's grace.

Moreover, since no one knew how great the contrition should be in order for it to suffice before God, this consolation was offered: Whoever could not have *contritio* (contrition) should have *attritio*, what I might call a halfway or beginning contrition.¹⁰² For they themselves have not understood either word, and they still know as little about what is being said as I do. Such *attritio* was then counted as *contritio* when people went to confession.

And if it happened that some said they could not repent or be sorrowful for their sins (as might happen in fornication or revenge, etc.), they were asked whether they at least wished or really desired to have contrition. If they said "yes" (because who would say "no," except the devil himself?), it was considered to be contrition, and their sins were forgiven on the basis of such a good work. Here they pointed to the example of St. Bernard.¹⁰³

Here we see how blind reason gropes around in the things of God and seeks comfort in its own works, according to its own darkened opinions. It cannot consider Christ or faith. If we look at this now in the light, then such contrition is a contrived and imaginary idea. It comes from one's own powers, without faith, without knowledge of Christ. In this state, a poor sinner who reflected on this lust or revenge would at times have more likely laughed than cried—except for those truly struck down by the law or falsely plagued by the devil with a sorrowful spirit. Otherwise, such contrition was certainly pure hypocrisy and did not kill the desire to sin. They had to be contrite, but would rather have sinned more—had it been without consequences.

Confession worked like this: Each person had to enumerate all of his or her sins (which is impossible). This was a great torment. Whatever the person had forgotten was forgiven only on the condition that when it was remembered it still had to be confessed. Under these circumstances people could never know whether they had confessed perfectly enough or whether confession would ever end. At the same time, people were directed to their works and told that the more perfectly they confessed and the more ashamed they were and the more they degraded themselves before the priest, the sooner and better they would make satisfaction for their sin. For such humility would certainly earn the grace of God.¹⁰⁴

Here, too, there was neither faith nor Christ, and the power of the absolution was not explained to them. Rather, their comfort was based on the enumeration of sins and humiliation. It

102 Medieval theologians often defined contrition as sorrow for sin out of love of God and attrition as sorrow for sin out of fear of punishment.

103 *Treatise on Grace and Free Will* IV, 10 (MPL 182:1007).

104 See Peter Abelard, *Ethica seu scito te ipsum*, chap. 24 (MPL 178:668), translated in *Peter Abelard's Ethics*, trans. D. E. Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 98–101.

is not possible to recount here what torments, rascality, and idolatry such confession has produced.¹⁰⁵

Satisfaction is truly the most intricate of the three because no one could know how much should be done for each individual sin, to say nothing of all sins. Here they came up with the following solution: they imposed a few satisfactions that a person could easily fulfill, such as saying the Lord's Prayer five times, fasting for a day, etc. For the penance that remained people were directed to purgatory.

Here, as well, there was only pure misery and destitution. Some imagined that they would never get out of purgatory because, according to the ancient canons, each mortal sin carried with it seven years of penance.¹⁰⁶ Still, confidence was placed in our work of satisfaction and, if the satisfaction could have been perfect, confidence would have been placed totally in it, and neither faith nor Christ would have been of any use. But such confidence was impossible. If they had done penance for a hundred years in this way, they would still not have known whether they had been penitent enough. This means always doing penance but never arriving at repentance.

At this point, the Holy See of Rome came to the rescue of the poor church and established indulgences. With these the pope forgave and remitted the satisfaction, first for seven years in a particular case, and then for a hundred years, etc. He also distributed indulgences among the cardinals and bishops, so that one could grant a hundred years and another a hundred days. However, the pope reserved for himself alone the right to remit the entire satisfaction.¹⁰⁷

Once this practice began to bring in money and the market in bulls became lucrative, the pope devised the jubilee year—which offered the forgiveness for all penalties and guilt¹⁰⁸—and attached it to Rome. The people came running, because everyone wanted to be set free from this heavy, unbearable burden. This was called “finding and digging up the treasures of the earth.”¹⁰⁹

105 The Latin translation inserts a reference to John Chrysostom's “Sermon on Penance” (MPG 48:754) and Philogonius, “Homily 6” (MPG 48:754).

106 A reference to the 47 *canones poenitentiales*, a collection of rules for the penitential widely used in the Middle Ages.

107 Plenary, or full, indulgences were instituted in 1095 by Pope Urban II in connection with the first Crusade.

108 Luther refers here in German to the Latin expression *remissio poenae et culpa*, which dates back to the mid-thirteenth century but disappears from official papal documents after the Council of Constance (1414–17). The phrase Luther uses for “jubilee year” is *Guldenjahr*, golden year, which the Latin renders *auriferum annum* (gold-producing year).

109 Cf. Daniel 11:43*. In the Middle Ages, Christians used this passage to express their conviction that the devil would show the Antichrist where the concealed riches of the earth were hidden in order to deceive the people.

Immediately, the popes rushed headlong and established many jubilee years, one after another. The more money he swallowed, the wider his gullet became. Therefore, through his legates he dispatched his jubilee years across the lands, until all the churches and every home were overflowing with them.¹¹⁰ Finally, he stormed into purgatory among the dead—first with Masses and the establishment of vigils; after that, with indulgences and the jubilee year. In the end, souls became so cheap that one could be sprung for a nickel.¹¹¹

Even this did not help at all. For although the pope taught the people to rely on and trust in such indulgences, he himself once again made the process uncertain when he asserted in his bulls, “Whoever desires to partake of the indulgence or the jubilee year should be contrite, go to confession, and give money.”¹¹² We have heard above that such contrition and confession are uncertain and hypocritical among them.¹¹³ Similarly, no one knew which soul was in purgatory, and, of those that were supposedly there, no one knew which had been truly contrite and had confessed. Thus, the pope took the money, comforted people with his authority and indulgence, and nevertheless directed them once again to their uncertain works.

Now, there were a few who did not consider themselves guilty of any actual sins of thought, word, and deeds—such as myself and others like me, who wanted to be monks and priests in monasteries and foundations. We resisted evil thoughts with fasting, keeping vigils, praying, holding Masses, using rough clothing and beds, etc. With earnestness and intensity we desired to be holy. Still, while we slept, the hereditary, inborn evil was at work according to its nature (as St. Augustine¹¹⁴ and St. Jerome,¹¹⁵ along with others, confess). However, each one held that some of the others were so holy, as we taught, that they were without sin and full of good works. On this basis, we transferred and sold our good works to others, as exceeding what we needed to get into heaven.¹¹⁶ This really is true, and there are seals, letters, and copies available to prove it.

110 Nicholas of Cusa proclaimed the jubilee of 1450. They were held in 1300, 1390, 1425, 1450, 1475, 1500, and 1525.

111 For vigils, see above, SA II, 2, 12. The first indulgences for the dead seem to have been offered in 1476 or 1500. Luther may be referring to the infamous verse of the indulgence preachers: “When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs!”

112 By the middle of the thirteenth century, contrition and confession were regularly connected with indulgences.

113 SA III, 3, 16–23.

114 *Confessions* II, 2, and X, 30 (*MPL* 32:674–77, 796f.; *CSEL* 33:29–32, 257f.; *NPNF*, ser. 1, 1:55f. and 153f.).

115 Epistle 22 (to Julia Eustochium), 7 (*MPL* 22:398; *NPNF*, ser. 2, 6:25).

116 A reference to works of supererogation, good deeds above and beyond those necessary for a person’s salvation, especially the monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the merits of which could be given to others.

Such people did not need repentance. For why did they need to be contrite since they had not consented to evil thoughts? What did they need to confess, since they had avoided evil words? For what did they need to make satisfaction, since their deeds were guiltless to the point that they could sell their excess righteousness to other poor sinners? At the time of Christ the Pharisees and scribes were such saints, too.¹¹⁷

At this point, the fiery angel St. John, the preacher of true repentance, comes and destroys both sides with a single thunderclap, saying, “Repent!”¹¹⁸ The one side thinks: “But we have already done penance.” The other thinks: “We do not need repentance.” John says, “All of you together repent! You here are false penitents; those over there are false saints. You all need the forgiveness of sins because you all still do not know what true sin is, let alone that you ought to repent of it or avoid it. Not one of you is any good. You are full of unbelief, stupidity, and ignorance regarding God and his will. For God is present over there, in the One from whose fullness we all must receive grace upon grace and without whom no human being can be justified before God.¹¹⁹ Therefore, if you want to repent, then repent in the right way. Your penance does not do it. And you hypocrites, who think you do not need repentance, you brood of vipers, who assured you that you will escape the wrath to come, etc.?”¹²⁰

St. Paul also preaches this way in Romans 3[:10–12*] and says, “No one has understanding; . . . no one is righteous; . . . no one seeks God; . . . no one shows kindness, not even one; . . . all have turned aside and become worthless.” And in Acts 17[:30*]: God commands all people

117 The Latin translation adds: “and hypocrites.”

118 Matthew 3:2*. Regarding the fiery angel, see Malachi 3:1*.

119 John 1:16* (which Luther reads as John the Baptizer’s statement; cf. John 1:29*) and Galatians 2:16*.

120 Matthew 3:7*.

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¹⁰ as it is written: “There is no one who is righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.”

[Romans 3:10–12 \(NRSV\)](#)

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³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

everywhere to repent.” He says, “all people”—no single human being is excluded. This repentance teaches us to recognize sin: namely, that we are all lost, neither hide nor hair of us is good, and we must become absolutely new and different people.

This repentance is not fragmentary or paltry—like the kind that does penance for actual sins—nor is it uncertain like that kind. It does not debate over what is a sin or what is not a sin. Instead, it simply lumps everything together and says, “Everything is pure sin with us. What would we want to spend so much time investigating, dissecting, or distinguishing?” Therefore, here as well, contrition is not uncertain, because there remains nothing that we might consider a “good” with which to pay for sin. Rather, there is plain, certain despair concerning all that we are, think, say, or do, etc.

Similarly, such confession also cannot be false, uncertain, or fragmentary. All who confess that everything is pure sin with them embrace all sins, allow no exceptions, and do not forget a single one. Thus, satisfaction can never be uncertain either. For it consists not in our uncertain, sinful works but rather in the suffering and blood of the innocent “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” [John 1:29*].¹²¹

About this repentance John preached and, after him, Christ in the Gospels, and we, too. With this repentance, we topple the pope and everything that is built upon our good works, because it is all built upon a rotten, flimsy foundation: good works or law. In fact, there are no good works but exclusively evil works, and no one keeps the law (as Christ says in John 7[:19*]), but all transgress it. Therefore the whole edifice is nothing but deceitful lies and hypocrisy, especially where it is at its holiest and most beautiful.

This repentance endures among Christians until death because it struggles with the sin that remains in the flesh throughout life. As St. Paul bears witness in Romans 7[:23*], he wars with

[Acts 17:30 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

[John 1:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹²¹ See also SA II, 1, 2.

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¹⁹ “Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?”

[John 7:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

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the law in his members, etc.—not by using his own powers but with the gift of the Holy Spirit which follows from the forgiveness of sins.¹²² This same gift daily cleanses and sweeps away the sins that remain and works to make people truly pure and holy.¹²³

The pope, theologians, lawyers, and all human beings know nothing about this. Rather, it is a teaching from heaven, revealed through the gospel, which must be called heresy among the godless saints.

Then again, some fanatical spirits might arise—perhaps some already are present, just as I saw for myself at the time of the disturbance¹²⁴—who maintain that all who once have received the Spirit or the forgiveness of sin or have become believers, should they sin after that, would still remain in the faith, and such sin would not harm them. They shout, “Do what you will! If you believe, then nothing else matters. Faith blots out all sin,” etc. They say, in addition, that if someone sins after receiving faith and the Spirit, then that person never really had the Spirit and faith. I have encountered many such foolish people, and I am concerned that such a devil is still present in some.

Therefore it is necessary to know and teach that when holy people—aside from the fact that they still have and feel original sin and also daily repent of it and struggle against it—somehow fall into a public sin (such as David, who fell into adultery, murder, and blasphemy against God), at that point faith and the Spirit have departed. The Holy Spirit does not allow sin to rule and gain the upper hand so that it is brought to completion, but the Spirit controls and resists so that sin is not able to do whatever it wants. However, when sin does whatever it wants, then the Holy Spirit and faith are not there. As St. John says (1 John 3:9): “Those who have been born of God do not sin . . . and cannot sin.” Nevertheless, this is also the truth (as the same St. John*

²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

[Romans 7:23 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹²² Romans 8:2*.

¹²³ Cf. SC, “Baptism,” 12.

¹²⁴ A reference to the Peasants’ War of 1525. Luther often linked “fanatical spirits” to his encounters with the likes of Thomas Müntzer and other leaders of the rebellion.

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⁹ Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God’s seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.

[1 John 3:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

writes [1:8*]): “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth of God¹²⁵ is not in us.”¹²⁶

[4:] Concerning the Gospel¹²⁷

We now want to return to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters.¹²⁸ Matthew 18[20*]: “Where two or three are gathered . . .”¹²⁹

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⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

[John 1:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

125 Luther adds the words “of God.”

126 SA III, 3, 42–45 was added to the text by Luther as he prepared the document for publication in 1538. The emphasis here would seem to be directed against John Agricola and the “antinomians,” who taught that the law did not apply to Christians. There was a heated controversy over this issue among the Wittenberg theologians in the middle and late 1530s. These paragraphs were not part of the document to which Agricola subscribed in December 1536.

127 From this point forward, because of an apparent heart attack, Luther was forced to dictate the rest of SA. Caspar Cruciger Sr. recorded SA III, 4–9 and 13–15, and another, unknown secretary recorded SA III, 10–12.

128 Luther uses a Latin phrase (*per mutuuum colloquium et consolationem fratrum*), which may have originated in the monastic practice of mutual confession, as a way of referring to absolution by a neighbor or friend. See *Sermons on Matthew 18–24* (1537–40) (WA 47:297–305) and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) (WA 6:546, 11–547, 35; LW 36:86–88).

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²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

[Matthew 18:20 \(NRSV\)](#)

129 Luther cites the text in Latin as “Where two are gathered . . .,” conflating this text with Matthew 18:19*.

[5:] Concerning Baptism

Baptism is nothing other than God's Word in the water, commanded by God's institution, or, as Paul says, "washing by the Word."¹³⁰ Moreover, Augustine says, "Let the Word be added to the element, and a sacrament results."¹³¹ Therefore we do not agree with Thomas¹³² and the Dominicans who forget the Word (God's institution) and say that God has placed a spiritual power in the water which, through the water, washes away sin. We also disagree with Scotus and the Franciscans,¹³³ who teach that baptism washes away sin through the assistance of the divine will, that is, that this washing takes place only through God's will and not at all through the Word and the water.

Concerning Infant Baptism

We maintain that we should baptize children because they also belong to the promised redemption that was brought about by Christ.¹³⁴ The church ought to extend it¹³⁵ to them.

[6:] Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar

We maintain that the bread and the wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ¹³⁶ and that they are not only offered to and received by upright Christians but also by evil ones.¹³⁷

130 Luther quotes Ephesians 5:26* according to the Latin Vulgate.

131 Luther cites from memory the Latin of Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of St. John* 80, 3, on John 15:3* (MPL 35:1840; NPNF, ser. 1, 7:344). Augustine's actual words were, "The Word is added to the element, and a sacrament results." Luther referred to this statement in other contexts: LC, "Baptism," 18, and LC, "Lord's Supper," 10.

132 Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, q. 62, a. 4.

133 John Duns Scotus, *Commentary on the Sentences* IV, d. 1, q. 2. He was followed by Franciscans like William of Occam, *Sentences* IV, q. 1.

134 Matthew 19:14*.

135 The Latin translation of the SA refers this ambiguous pronoun to both baptism and redemption.

136 In Luther's rough draft of his original manuscript, he had first written "under the bread and the wine." The Wittenberg Concord, an agreement between the South German Protestants (especially Martin Bucer and other Strasbourg preachers) and the Wittenberg theologians signed in 1536, reads, "with the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, exhibited and received. . . ." Cf. CA X, 1.

And we maintain that no one should distribute only one kind in the sacrament. Nor do we need the lofty learning which teaches us that there is as much under one kind as under both. This is how the sophists and the Council of Constance teach.¹³⁸ Even if it were true that there is as much under one kind as under both, one kind is still not the complete order and institution as established and commanded by Christ. Especially do we condemn and curse in God's name those who not only allow distribution of both kinds to be omitted but also dictatorially prohibit, condemn, and slander the distribution of both kinds as heresy. Thereby they set themselves against and above Christ, our Lord and God, etc.

Concerning transubstantiation, we have absolutely no regard for the subtle sophistry¹³⁹ of those who teach that bread and wine surrender or lose their natural substances and that only the form and color of the bread remain, but it is no longer real bread. For it is in closest agreement with Scripture to say that bread is and remains there, as St. Paul himself indicates [1 Cor. 10:16*; 11:28*]: "The bread that we break . . ." and "Eat of the bread."

[7:] Concerning the Keys

The keys are an office and authority given to the church by Christ¹⁴⁰ to bind and loose sins—not only the crude and notorious sins but also the subtle, secret ones that only God knows. As it is

137 The Wittenberg Concord reads, "As Paul says that the unworthy also eat, so they [the signers] hold that, where the words and institution of Christ are retained, the body and blood of the Lord are truly offered also to the unworthy, and that the unworthy receive."

138 The 15 June 1415 decree stated that "the entire body and blood of Christ is in truth contained both under the form of the bread and under the form of the wine."

139 In *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520) (WA 6:456, 36; LW 44:199), Luther called transubstantiation an "illusion [German: *Wahn*; cf. LW: "opinion"] of St. Thomas and the pope."

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¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

[1 Corinthians 10:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁸ Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

[1 Corinthians 11:28 \(NRSV\)](#)

140 Matthew 16:19*, 18:18*; and John 20:23*.

written [Ps. 19:12*], “But who can detect their errors?” And Paul himself complains in Romans 7[:23*] that with his flesh he served the “law of sin.” For it is not in our power but in God’s alone to judge which, how great, and how many sins there are. As it is written [Ps. 143:2*]: “Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.” And Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 4[:4*]: “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.”

[8:] Concerning Confession

Because absolution or the power of the keys is also a comfort and help against sin and a bad conscience and was instituted by Christ in the gospel,¹⁴¹ confession, or absolution, should by no means be allowed to fall into disuse in the church—especially for the sake of weak consciences and for the wild young people, so that they may be examined and instructed in Christian teaching.

However, the enumeration of sins ought to be a matter of choice for each individual: each person should be able to determine what and what not to enumerate. As long as we are in the

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¹² But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

[Psalm 19:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

[Romans 7:23 \(NRSV\)](#)

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² Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

[Psalm 143:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

[1 Corinthians 4:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁴¹ See above, n. 140.

flesh we will not lie if we say, “I am a poor person, full of sin.”¹⁴² Romans 7[:23*] states: “I see in my members another law. . . .” Because private absolution¹⁴³ is derived from the office of the keys, we should not neglect it but value it highly, just as all the other offices of the Christian church.

In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before. We say this to protect ourselves from the enthusiasts,¹⁴⁴ that is, the “spirits,” who boast that they have the Spirit apart from and before contact with the Word. On this basis, they judge, interpret, and twist the Scripture or oral Word according to their pleasure. Müntzer did this, and there are still many doing this today, who set themselves up as shrewd judges between the spirit and the letter without knowing what they say or teach.¹⁴⁵ The papacy is also purely religious raving¹⁴⁶ in that the pope boasts that “all laws are in the shrine of his heart”¹⁴⁷ and that what he decides and commands in his churches is supposed to be Spirit and law—even when it is above or contrary to the Scriptures or the spoken Word.¹⁴⁸ This is all the old devil and old snake, who also turned Adam and Eve into enthusiasts and led them from the external Word of God to “spirituality” and their own presumption—although he even accomplished this by means of other, external words. In the same way, our enthusiasts also condemn the external Word, and yet they themselves do not keep silent. Instead, they fill the world with their chattering and scribbling—as if the Spirit could not come through the Scriptures or the spoken word of the apostles, but the Spirit must come through their own writings and words. Why do they not abstain from their preaching and writing until the Spirit himself comes into the people apart from and in advance of their writings? After

142 2 Esdras 7:68*. This is a reference to the general confession. See SC, “Baptism,” 22.

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²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Romans 7:23 (NRSV)

143 Luther uses a Latin phrase, *absolutio privata*, rather than the customary *confessio privata* (private confession). See LC, “Confession,” 15–17.

144 As was his custom, Luther uses the German form of a technical Greek and Latin term for a person in whom the god dwells (*en-theou*), that is, a “spiritist” or spiritualist. It also became a general epithet for a heretic. In other writings he uses the German word *Schwärmer*, that is, a fanatic, one who raves (cf. the English cognate, “swarm”).

145 CA V, 4. Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:6*.

146 German: *Enthusiasmus*, a Greek loan word meaning possessed by the god within oneself.

147 *Corpus juris canonici, Liber Sextus I, 2, c. 1.*

148 Tr 6.

*all, they boast that the Spirit has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures. There is no time here to debate these matters more extensively. We have dealt with them sufficiently elsewhere.*¹⁴⁹

For both those who believe prior to baptism and those who become believers in baptism have everything through the external Word that comes first. For example, adults who have reached the age of reason must have previously heard, “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved” [Mark 16:16], even though they were at first without faith and only after ten years received the Spirit and baptism. In Acts 10[:1ff*.] Cornelius had long since heard from the Jews about a future Messiah, through whom he would be justified before God. His prayers and alms were acceptable in such faith (so Luke calls him “righteous and God-fearing” [Acts 10:2*, 22*]). Without such a preceding Word or hearing he could neither believe nor be righteous. However, St. Peter had to reveal to him that the Messiah now had come. (Up until then he had believed in him as the one who was to come.) His faith in the future Messiah did not hold him*

149 See, for example, *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525) (WA 18:136–39; LW 40:146–49) and *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15* (1532) (WA 36:491, 498–507; LW 28:67, 75–82).

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¹⁶ The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.

[Mark 16:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹ In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called.

[Acts 10:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

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² He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.

[Acts 10:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²² They answered, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.”

[Acts 10:22 \(NRSV\)](#)

captive along with the hardened, unbelieving Jews, but he knew that now he had to be saved by the present Messiah and not, in consort with the Jews, deny or persecute him.

In short: enthusiasm clings to Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world—fed and spread¹⁵⁰ among them as poison by the old dragon. It is the source, power, and might of all the heresies, even that of the papacy and Mohammed.¹⁵¹ Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil. For God even desired to appear to Moses first in the burning bush and by means of the spoken word;¹⁵² no prophet—not even Elijah or Elisha—received the Spirit outside of or without the Ten Commandments; John the Baptist was not conceived without Gabriel’s preceding Word,¹⁵³ nor did he leap in his mother’s womb without Mary’s voice;¹⁵⁴ and St. Peter says: the prophets did not prophesy “by human will” but “by the Holy Spirit,” indeed, as “holy people of God.”¹⁵⁵ However, without the external Word, they were not holy—much less would the Holy Spirit have moved them to speak while they were still unholy. Peter says they were holy because the Holy Spirit speaks through them.¹⁵⁶

[9:] Concerning Excommunication

We maintain that the “great” excommunication, as the pope calls it, is a purely secular penalty and does not concern us who serve the church. However, the “small” (that is, the truly Christian) excommunication is that public, obstinate sinners should not be admitted to the sacrament or other fellowship in the church until they improve their behavior and avoid sin. The preachers should not mix civil punishments together with this spiritual penalty or excommunication.¹⁵⁷

[10:] Concerning Ordination and Vocation¹⁵⁸

150 German: *gestiftet und gegiftet*.

151 Luther, like most Christians of his day, viewed Mohammed as guilty of a christological heresy.

152 Exodus 3:2ff*.

153 Luke 1:13–20*.

154 Luke 1:41–44*.

155 2 Peter 1:21* according to the alternate reading in the NRSV.

156 SA III, 8, 3–13 is only found in printed versions of the SA.

157 The *excommunicatio major* excluded a person from both the church and political communities, while the *excommunicatio minor* restricted a person only from the sacrament.

158 Luther uses a latinized German word, *Vokation*, which refers to an ecclesiastical vocation or call.

If the bishops wanted to be true bishops and to attend to the church and the gospel, then a person might—for the sake of love and unity but not out of necessity—give them leave to ordain and confirm us and our preachers, provided all the pretense and fraud of unchristian ceremony and pomp were set aside. However, they are not now and do not want to be true bishops. Rather, they are political lords and princes who do not want to preach, teach, baptize, commune, or perform any proper work or office of the church. In addition, they persecute and condemn those who do take up a call to such an office. Despite this, the church must not remain without servants on their account.

Therefore, as the ancient examples of the church and the Fathers teach us, we should and will ordain suitable persons to this office ourselves.¹⁵⁹ They may not forbid or prevent us, even according to their own laws, because their laws say that those who are ordained even by heretics should also be regarded as ordained and remain ordained.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, St. Jerome writes about the church at Alexandria that it had originally been ruled by the priests and preachers together, without bishops.¹⁶¹

[11:] Concerning the Marriage of Priests

They had neither the authority nor the right to forbid marriage and burden the divine estate of priests with perpetual celibacy. Instead, they acted like anti-Christian, tyrannical, wicked scoundrels and thereby gave occasion for all kinds of horrible, abominable, and countless sins of unchastity, in which they are still mired. Now, as little as the power has been given to them or to us to make a female out of a male or a male out of a female—or to abolish sexual distinctions altogether—so little did they have the power to separate such creatures of God or to forbid them from living together honestly in marriage. Therefore we are unwilling to consent to their miserable celibacy, nor will we tolerate it. We want marriage to be free, as God ordered and instituted it. We do not want to disrupt or inhibit God’s work, for St. Paul says that would be “a teaching of demons.”¹⁶²

[12:] Concerning the Church

We do not concede to them that they are the church, and frankly they are not the church. We do not want to hear what they command or forbid in the name of the church, because, God be praised, a seven-year-old child¹⁶³ knows what the church is: holy believers and “the little sheep

159 The first ordination conducted by the Wittenberg reformers in Wittenberg took place on 20 October 1535.

160 Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 68, chap. 1; III, dist. 4, chap. 107.

161 For the references see SA II, 4, 9.

162 1 Timothy 4:1*.

163 This was the age by which a child had learned the Apostles’ Creed, what Luther sometimes called the Children’s Creed (see WA 50:624; LW 41:143). It has nothing to do with the age of discernment.

who hear the voice of their shepherd.”¹⁶⁴ This is why children pray in this way, “I believe in one holy Christian church.”¹⁶⁵ This holiness does not consist of surplices, tonsures, long albs, or other ceremonies of theirs that they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures. Its holiness exists in the Word of God and true faith.

[13:] How a Person Is Justified and Concerning Good Works

I cannot change at all what I have consistently taught about this until now, namely, that “through faith” (as St. Peter says)¹⁶⁶ we receive a different, new, clean heart and that, for the sake of Christ our mediator, God will and does regard us as completely righteous and holy. Although sin in the flesh is still not completely gone or dead, God will nevertheless not count it or consider it.

Good works follow such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sin, and whatever in these works is still sinful or imperfect should not even be counted as sin or imperfection, precisely for the sake of this same Christ. Instead, the human creature should be called and should be completely righteous and holy—according to both the person and his or her works—by the pure grace and mercy that have been poured and spread over us in Christ. Therefore we cannot boast about the great merit of our works, where they are viewed apart from grace and mercy. Rather, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” [1 Cor. 1:31*; 2 Cor. 10:17*]. That is, if one has a gracious God, then everything is good. Furthermore, we also say that if good works do not follow, then faith is false and not true.

[14:] Concerning Monastic Vows

164 Cf. John 10:3*.

165 Luther quotes from a German translation of the Creed that had been in use in Germany since the fifteenth century. See also SC, “Creed,” 3, and LC, “Creed,” 3.

166 In Acts 15:9*.

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³¹ in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

[1 Corinthians 1:31 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁷ “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

[2 Corinthians 10:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

Because monastic vows are in direct conflict with the first and chief article,¹⁶⁷ they should simply be done away with. It is about these that Christ spoke in Matthew 24[:5*] (“ ‘I am Christ . . .’ ”). For those who vow to live a monastic life believe that they lead a better life than the ordinary Christian, and through their works they intend to help not only themselves but others get to heaven. This is known as denying Christ, etc. They boast, on the basis of their St. Thomas, that monastic vows are equal to baptism.¹⁶⁸ This is blasphemy against God.¹⁶⁹

[15:] Concerning Human Regulations

That the papists say human regulations help attain the forgiveness of sins or merit salvation is unchristian and damnable. As Christ says [Matt. 15:9*], “In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.” Also, the Letter to Titus [1:14*] mentions “those who reject the truth.” Furthermore, it is also not right when they say that it is a mortal sin to break such regulations.

These are the articles on which I must stand and on which I intend to stand, God willing, until my death. I can neither change nor concede anything in them. If anyone desires to do so, it is on that person’s conscience.¹⁷⁰

167 SA II, 1.

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⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah!’ and they will lead many astray.

[Matthew 24:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

168 Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 2, q. 189, a. 3, ad 3, and *CA* XXVI.

169 The last sentence of SA III, 14, was written into the text of the original manuscript by Luther himself.

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⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’ ”

[Matthew 15:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

*

¹⁴ not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of those who reject the truth.

[Titus 1:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

170 SA III, 15, 3–5 forms a conclusion of sorts to the entire document. Both the original publication of 1538 and the Book of Concord begin this paragraph with a separate ornamental initial.

Finally, there still remains the papal bag of tricks, filled with foolish, childish articles such as the consecration of churches, baptizing bells, baptizing altar stones, and inviting to the rites the “godparents” who give money for these things. This baptizing mocks and ridicules Holy Baptism and ought not be tolerated.

Moreover, there is the consecration of candles, palms, spices, oats, cakes, etc.¹⁷¹ In fact, these cannot be called consecration, nor are they. Rather, they are pure mockery and deception. As far as these innumerable magic tricks go—which we suggest their god and they themselves adore until they become tired of them—we do not wish to bother with these things.

Subscriptions to the Smalcald Articles

DR. MARTIN LUTHER subscribes

DR. JUSTUS JONAS, rector, subscribes with his own hand

DR. JOHN BUGENHAGEN of Pomerania subscribes

DR. CASPAR CRUCIGER subscribes

NICHOLAS AMSDORF of Magdeburg subscribes

GEORGE SPALATIN of Altenburg subscribes

I, PHILIP MELANTHON, also regard the above articles as true and Christian. However, concerning the pope I maintain that if he would allow the gospel, we, too, may (for the sake of peace and general unity among those Christians who are now under him and might be in the future) grant to him his superiority over the bishops which he has “by human right.”¹⁷²

JOHN AGRICOLA of Eisleben subscribes¹⁷³

GABRIEL ZWILLING subscribes¹⁷⁴

171 On Holy Saturday the “old fire” was extinguished in the church, and the “new fire” was lit and sprinkled with holy water. At the Easter Vigil the Easter candle was consecrated and lit from this “new fire.” On Candlemas (2 February), candles were consecrated. On Palm Sunday, palms were consecrated. On the Assumption of Mary (15 August), herbs, flowers, ears of corn, honey, grapevines, etc., were consecrated. On St. Stephen’s Day (26 December), oats were consecrated. On Easter Sunday, unleavened Easter cakes were consecrated.

172 Melancthon began using “Melancthon” in 1531. The phrase “by human right” is in Latin (*iure humano*). Cf. CA XXVIII, 29.

173 These first eight subscriptions to SA were obtained at a gathering of theologians at Wittenberg in December 1536.

I, DR. URBAN RHEGIUS, superintendent of the churches in the duchy of Lüneburg, subscribe for myself and in the name of my brothers and in the name of the church of Hanover

I, STEPHEN AGRICOLA, as minister in Hof, subscribe

And I, JOHN DRACONITES, professor and minister of Marburg, subscribe

I, CONRAD FIGENBOTZ, subscribe to the glory of God that I have believed and now preach and believe firmly as above

I, ANDREW OSIANDER, minister of Nuremberg, subscribe

Master VEIT DIETRICH, minister of Nuremberg

I, ERHARD SCHNEPF, preacher of Stuttgart, subscribe

CONRAD OETTINGER of Pforzheim, preacher of Duke Ulrich [of Württemberg]

SIMON SCHNEEWEISS, pastor of the church in Crailsheim

I, JOHN SCHLAGENHAUFEN, pastor of the church of Köthen, subscribe

Master GEORGE HELT of Forchheim

Master ADAM [KRAFFT] of Fulda, preacher of Hesse

Master ANTON CORVINUS

I, JOHN BUGENHAGEN, subscribe again in the name of Master John Brenz, who, when leaving Smalcald, directed me both orally and in a letter, which was shown to these brothers who have subscribed, to do so¹⁷⁵

I, DENNIS MELANDER, subscribe to the Augsburg Confession, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, and the Wittenberg Concord on the subject of the Eucharist

174 Zwilling signed the SA in January 1537.

175 Brenz's note to Bugenhagen, dated 23 February 1537, reads in part: "I have read and reread again and again the Confession and Apology presented at Augsburg . . . the Formula of Concord concerning the sacrament, made at Wittenberg with Dr. Bucer and others . . . the articles written at the Assembly at Smalcald in the German language by Dr. Martin Luther . . . and the tract concerning the Papacy and the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops. . . . I judge that all these agree with Holy Scripture, and with the belief of the true and pure catholic church. . . . I ask you . . . Dr. John Bugenhagen . . . that your excellency add my name, if it be necessary, to all the others. . . ."

PAUL RHODE, superintendent of Stettin

GERHARD OEMCKEN, superintendent of the church of Minden

I, BRIXIUS NORTHANUS, minister of the church of Christ in Soest, subscribe to the articles of the Reverend Father Martin Luther and confess that until now I have believed and taught this and, by the Spirit of Christ, will in like manner believe and teach

MICHAEL COELIUS, preacher of Mansfeld, subscribes

Master PETER GELTNER, preacher in Frankfurt [am Main], subscribes

WENDELL FABER, pastor of Seeburg in Mansfeld

I, JOHN AEPINUS, subscribe¹⁷⁶

Likewise, I, JOHN [TIMANN from] Amsterdam of Bremen

I, FREDERICK MYCONIUS, pastor of the church of Gotha in Thuringia, subscribe for myself and in the name of Justus Menius of Eisenach

I, John Lang, doctor and preacher of the church in Erfurt, in my name and on behalf of my coworkers in the gospel, namely,¹⁷⁷

The Rev. Licentiate Louis Platz of Melsungen

The Rev. Master Sigmund Kirchner

The Rev. Wolfgang Kiswetter

The Rev. Melchior Weittmann

The Rev. John Thall

The Rev. John Kilian

The Rev. Nicholas Faber

176 Aepinus had originally subscribed to SA thus: "John Aepinus of Hamburg subscribes; concerning the superiority of the pontiff, he agrees with all the representatives from Hamburg to the opinions of Reverend Philip, which were added at the end." He then crossed this out and signed without reservation.

177 The final ten subscriptions were obtained in March 1537, when Luther and his entourage stopped in Erfurt on their way back to Wittenberg from Smalcald.

I, The Rev. Andrew Menser, subscribe in my own hand

And I, Egidius Melcher, have subscribed with my own hand

1

Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope

The bishop of Rome claims to be superior by divine right to all bishops and pastors.¹ In addition, he claims to possess by divine right the power of both swords, that is, the authority to confer and transfer royal authority.² Third, he states that it is necessary for salvation to believe these things. For these reasons the Roman bishop calls himself the vicar of Christ on earth.³ We hold and publicly declare that these three articles of faith are false, impious, tyrannical, and ruinous to the church. In order that our assertion may be understood, we will first clarify what our opponents mean by the claim of superiority by divine right over all bishops. They take the pope to be the universal or, as they say, ecumenical bishop, that is, the one from whom all bishops and pastors throughout the world are bound to seek ordination and confirmation because he has the right to choose, ordain, confirm, and depose any bishop.⁴ Moreover, he claims the authority to make laws concerning worship, alterations in the sacraments, and teaching. He wants his decrees and laws to be regarded as articles of faith or commandments of God and thus as binding on the conscience of the believer.⁵ Because he claims to exercise this power by divine right, he means it to take precedence even over God's commandments. And then, what is even more atrocious, he adds that it is necessary for salvation to believe all this.

1. First of all, therefore, let us show from the gospel that the Roman bishop is not superior by divine right to other bishops and pastors. In Luke 22[:24–27*] Christ expressly forbids lordship

¹Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. 2000. *The Book of Concord : The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* . Fortress Press: Minneapolis

1 See Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 21, chap. 3; dist. 22, chap.1, 2: Gregory IX, *Decretalium* V, 33, c. 23.

2 See in particular the bull *Unam Sanctam* (1301) of Pope Boniface VIII.

3 This title was first used by the popes from the time of Pope Innocent III. See Martin Luther on the three walls which the papacy had built to protect itself, *Letter to the German Nobility* (1520) (WA 6:406–15; LW 44:126–39).

4 The claim is made on the basis of papal “plenitude of power.” See Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 21, chap. 1, 8.

5 See Gratian *Decretum* I, dist. 15, chap. 2; dist. 19, chap. 2, 6; dist. 20, chap. 1.

*

among the apostles, for the question of who would be in charge and become, as it were, the vicar of the absent Christ was the very thing about which they were arguing when Christ spoke of his passion. Christ rebuked the apostles for this error and taught that there would be neither lordship nor superiority among them but that the apostles would be sent as equals to carry out the ministry of the gospel in common. For that reason he said, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, but it is not so with you. Rather whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant.” The contrast here shows that lordship is rejected. So does the parable in which, during a similar dispute about authority, Christ sets a little boy in their midst to show that just as the child neither assumes nor desires the chief place, so among his servants there will be no preeminence [Matt. 18:1–4*].

2. According to John 20[:21*], Christ commissions the apostles as equals, without distinction, when he says: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” He sends forth each one

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

²⁵ But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors.

²⁶ But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.

²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

[Luke 22:24–27 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

² He called a child, whom he put among them,

³ and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

[Matthew 18:1–4 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

[John 20:21 \(NRSV\)](#)

individually in the same way as he himself was sent, he says, and therefore he bestows upon no one any privilege or lordship over the rest.

3. In Galatians 2[:2*, 6*] Paul clearly asserts that he was neither ordained nor confirmed by Peter, nor does he acknowledge Peter as one from whom such confirmation had to be sought. He expressly argues that his call did not depend on the authority of Peter, yet he should have acknowledged Peter as his superior, if Peter were such by divine right. Paul says, however, that he began preaching the gospel immediately without consulting Peter [Gal. 1:15–24*]. He also

*

² I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.

Galatians 2:2 (NRSV)

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⁶ And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)— those leaders contributed nothing to me.

Galatians 2:6 (NRSV)

*

¹⁵ But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased

¹⁶ to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being,

¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days;

¹⁹ but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother.

²⁰ In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!

²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia,

²² and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ;

²³ they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy."

²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.

states, “And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those leaders contributed nothing to me” [Gal. 2:6*]. Therefore, since Paul makes it clear that he had no desire to ask for Peter’s confirmation, even when he had come to him, he teaches that the authority of the ministry depends upon the Word of God, that Peter was not superior to other apostles, and that ordination or confirmation was not to be sought from Peter alone.

4. In 1 Corinthians 3[:4–8*, 21–22*] Paul regards all ministers as equals and teaches that the church is superior to its ministers. Thus he grants neither preeminence nor lordship over the church or the other ministers to Peter. For he says, “All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas” [1 Cor. 3:21–22*], which is to say, neither Peter nor the other ministers may assume

[Galatians 1:15–24 \(NRSV\)](#)

*

⁶ And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)— those leaders contributed nothing to me.

[Galatians 2:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

*

⁴ For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely human?

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each.

⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each.

[1 Corinthians 3:4–8 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²¹ So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours,

²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future— all belong to you,

[1 Corinthians 3:21–22 \(NRSV\)](#)

*

lordship or preeminence over the church or burden the church with traditions or allow the authority of any person to count for more than the Word. Nor may they pit the authority of Cephas against that of the other apostles, asserting, as was done at that time, “Cephas, who is the greater apostle, observes this; therefore Paul and the others ought to also.” Paul deprives Peter of this as a pretext and denies that his authority takes precedence over that of others or of the church. 1 Peter 5[:3*]: “Not as domineering over the clergy . . .”⁶

Historical Evidence

5. The Council of Nicea determined that the bishop of Alexandria would preside over the churches in the East and that the bishop of Rome would have charge of the “suburban” churches, that is, those in the Roman provinces in the West.⁷ Thus, in the beginning the authority of the Roman bishop grew out of a conciliar decision, that is, by human right, for if the Roman bishop had possessed his superiority by divine right, it would not have been proper for the council to withdraw any jurisdiction from him and to transfer it to the see of Alexandria. On the contrary, all the Eastern bishops would have been obliged forever to seek ordination and confirmation from Rome.

6. Again, the Council of Nicea established that bishops are to be elected by their own churches with one or more neighboring bishops present.⁸ As Cyprian⁹ and Augustine¹⁰ testify,

²¹ So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours,

²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future— all belong to you,

[1 Corinthians 3:21–22 \(NRSV\)](#)

*

³ Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.

[1 Peter 5:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁶ Translation from the Vulgate.

⁷ Canon 6 of the Nicene Council (325). The term “suburban” in this canon referred to the ten provinces of Italy.

⁸ Canon 4 of the Nicene Council (325).

⁹ Cyprian, Epistle 67:4–5, to Presbyter Felix and Deacon Aelius (*CSEL* 3/2: 739, 7–18; *ANF* 5:370–71). In older editions this was appended to the letter to Cornelius cited below.

¹⁰ Augustine, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists* II, 2 (MPL 43:428; *NPNF*, ser. 1, 4:426).

this same practice was observed in the West and in the Latin churches. Cyprian states that in his fourth letter to Cornelius:¹¹

“Therefore, according to divine tradition and apostolic usage, one should carefully follow and safeguard the practice maintained by us and in almost all the provinces. For the proper celebration of ordinations, other neighboring bishops of the same province should assemble with the people for whom a leader is to be ordained. A bishop is to be chosen in the presence of people who are fully acquainted with the life of each candidate. This was the case among you with the ordination of our colleague Sabinus: that by the vote of the whole body and the decision of the bishops gathered in their presence, the episcopal office was entrusted to him with the laying on of hands.”

Cyprian calls this practice a divine tradition and apostolic usage and declares that it was observed in almost all the provinces. Therefore, since in most of the world, in both Greek and Latin churches, ordination and confirmation were not sought from the Roman bishop, it is clear enough that the churches at that time did not attribute preeminence and lordship to the Roman bishop.

7. Such preeminence is impossible, for it is impossible for one bishop to be the overseer of all the churches in the world or for churches located in remote places to seek ordination from one bishop only. It is certain that the kingdom of Christ is scattered throughout the world and that presently in the East there are many churches that seek neither ordination nor confirmation from the Roman bishop. Therefore, because such preeminence is impossible and has never been established practice and because churches in most parts of the world do not acknowledge it, clearly it was not instituted [by Christ].¹²

8. Many ancient councils were called and held at which the bishop of Rome did not preside, such as Nicea and most others. This also testifies to the fact that the church at that time did not recognize the primacy or superiority of the Roman bishop.

9. Jerome says: “If it is authority one is after, the world is greater than the city.¹³ Wherever there is a bishop, whether in Rome, Eugubium,¹⁴ Constantinople, Rhegium, or Alexandria, he has the same worth and priestly dignity. It is the power of riches and the humility of poverty that exalts or lowers him.”¹⁵

11 Cyprian, Epistle 67. See n. 9.

12 German: “was not instituted by Christ and does not derive from divine right.”

13 German: “that is, the world is greater than the city of Rome.”

14 Modern Gubbio, in Italy.

15 Jerome, Epistle 146 to Evangelus (*MPL* 22:1194; *NPNF*, ser. 2, 6:289).

10. Writing to the patriarch of Alexandria, Gregory objects to being addressed as universal bishop.¹⁶ Also, he states in the records that primacy was offered to the Roman bishop at the Council of Chalcedon but that he did not accept it.¹⁷

11. Finally, how can the pope be superior by divine right to the whole church when the church elects him and when gradually the custom came to prevail that emperors confirmed the Roman bishops in office?¹⁸ Moreover, after the bishops of Rome and Constantinople had struggled for a long time over primacy, the emperor Phocas finally determined that it should be given to Rome.¹⁹ Yet if the ancient church had acknowledged the primacy of the Roman pontiff, this controversy could not have occurred, nor would an imperial decree have been necessary.

But certain verses are cited in objection to our position, namely: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” [Matt. 16:18*]. Also: “I will give you the keys” [Matt. 16:19*]; “Feed my sheep” [John 21:17*]; and certain others.²⁰ However, because this whole controversy

16 Gregory I, *Epistles*, bk. VIII, no. 30, to Eulogius, bishop of Alexandria (*MPL* 77:933; *NPNF*, ser. 2, 12:241).

17 *Epistles*, bk. V, no. 43, to Eulogius, bishop of Alexandria, and Anastasius, bishop of Antioch (*MPL* 77:771; *NPNF*, ser. 2, 12:178–80).

18 The Byzantine emperor confirmed the newly elected pope during the period of the former’s rule over Italy (until 781). Agreements providing for similar confirmation were concluded by Emperors Lothair I and Otto I with the pope in 824 and 962, respectively.

19 In 607, Pope Boniface III obtained recognition of Rome as “head of all the churches” from the Byzantine Emperor Phocas.

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¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

[Matthew 16:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

*

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

[Matthew 16:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

has been treated fully and accurately elsewhere in the books of our theologians²¹ and it is not possible to rehearse the details here, we refer to those writings and wish to underscore their arguments. Nevertheless, we shall respond briefly by way of interpretation. In all these sayings Peter represents the whole company of apostles, as is apparent from the text itself. For Christ did not question Peter only but asked, “Who do you (plural) say that I am?” [Matt. 16:15*]. What is said here in the singular—“I will give you the keys” and “Whatever you bind . . .”—is said elsewhere in the plural: “Whatever you (plural) bind . . .” [Matt. 18:18*] and, in John [20:23*], “if you (plural) forgive the sins of any . . .” These words show that the keys were entrusted equally to all the apostles and that all the apostles were commissioned in like manner. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the keys do not belong to one particular person but to the church, as many clear and irrefutable arguments show. For having spoken of the keys in Matthew 18[18*], Christ goes on to say: “Wherever two or three agree on earth . . .” [Matt. 18:19–20*].

[John 21:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

20 See Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 19, chap. 7; dist. 21, chap. 2, 3; dist. 22, chap. 2; II, chap. 24, q. 1, c. 18; also the works of John Eck, Jerome Emser, Silvester Prierias, and Augustine Alvelde in defense of papal primacy.

21 See, for example, Luther’s interpretation of these passages in *Proceedings at Augsburg* (1518) (WA 2:19–20; LW 31:280–82); *On the Papacy in Rome* (1530) (WA 6:309–11, 314–21; LW 39:86–89, 92–101); *Sermon Preached in Leipzig* (1519) (WA 2:248–49; LW 51:59–60). For Luther’s later interpretation, see *Against the Roman Papacy* (1545) (WA 54:231, 239–53, 273–83; LW 41:293–94, 303–20, 344–56).

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¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

[Matthew 16:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

[Matthew 18:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

[John 20:23 \(NRSV\)](#)

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Thus, he grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the church, and for the same reason the church has primary possession of the right to call ministers. One must, then, see Peter as representing the whole company of apostles in these sayings, which consequently do not attribute to him any special prerogative, preeminence, or lordship.

Granted that it is said, “On this rock I will build my church” [Matt. 16:18*], certainly the church is not built upon the authority of a human being but upon the ministry of that confession Peter made, in which he proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. For that reason Christ addresses him as a minister: “On this rock,” that is, on this ministry. Furthermore, the ministry of the New Testament is not bound to places or persons like the Levitical ministry, but is scattered throughout the whole world and exists wherever God gives God’s gifts: apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers [cf. Eph. 4:11*]. That ministry is not valid because of the authority of any person but because of the Word handed down by Christ. Most of the holy Fathers (Origen,²² Ambrose,²³ Cyprian,²⁴ Hilary,²⁵ Bede)²⁶ interpret the statement “On this rock . . .” in the same

¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

[Matthew 18:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

[Matthew 18:19–20 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

[Matthew 16:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

[Ephesians 4:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

²² Origen, *Commentary on Matthew XII*, 11 (MPG 13:1000; ANF 10:456).

²³ Here Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians II*, 20 (MPL 17:380).

way, that is, as not applying to the person or superiority of Peter. Thus Chrysostom declares: “Christ says ‘on this rock,’ not ‘on Peter.’ For truly he has built his church not upon the man but upon Peter’s faith. But what was that faith? You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”²⁷ And this from Hilary: “The Father revealed this to Peter so that he might declare: ‘You are the Son of the living God.’ Upon this rock of confession, therefore, the church is built. This faith is the foundation of the church.”²⁸

As to the passages “Feed my sheep” [John 21:17*] and “Do you love me more than these?” [John 21:15*], they do not support the conclusion that a special superiority has been given to Peter. Christ orders him to feed the flock, that is, to preach the Word or govern the church by the Word—something Peter holds in common with other apostles.

The second article²⁹ is even clearer than the first, for Christ gave to his apostles only spiritual authority, that is, the command to preach the gospel, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, to administer the sacraments, and to excommunicate the ungodly without the use of physical force. He did not give them the power of the sword or the right to establish, take possession, or dispose of the kingdoms of the world. Indeed, Christ said, “Go, . . . teaching them to obey everything that

24 Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* 4 (CSEL 3/1: 213, 2–5; ANF 5:422).

25 Hilary, *On the Trinity* VI, 36–37 (MPL 10:186–87; NPNF, ser. 2, 9:111–12).

26 Bede, *Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew* III, 16 (MPL 92:73–79).

27 The exact citation cannot be determined; see, however, Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 54, 3 (MPG 58:534; NPNF, ser. 1, 10:333). See also Theophylact, *Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew* (MPG 123:219).

28 See n. 25 above.

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¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

[John 21:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

[John 21:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

29 The reference is to the second of the three papal claims listed above in par. 2.

I have commanded you” [Matt. 28:19–20*]. Again, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” [John 20:21*]. It is certain that Christ was not sent to wield the sword or to possess worldly authority, for as he himself said, “My kingdom is not from this world” [John 18:36*]. Also, Paul says, “I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith” [2 Cor. 1:24*], and again, “for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human” [2 Cor. 10:4*]. Thus, the fact that during his passion Christ was crowned with thorns and led forth to be mocked in royal purple signified that there would come a time when, his spiritual kingdom having been rejected and the gospel overthrown, another worldly realm would be established on the pretext of ecclesiastical power.

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¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

[Matthew 28:19–20 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

[John 20:21 \(NRSV\)](#)

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³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

[John 18:36 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁴ I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.

[2 Corinthians 1:24 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments

[2 Corinthians 10:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

For this reason the constitution of Boniface VIII,³⁰ Distinction 22 of the chapter “Omnes,”³¹ and other similar statements, which contend that the pope is lord of the kingdoms of the world by divine right, are false and impious.

This conviction brought horrible darkness upon the church and afterward precipitated great tumult in Europe. For the ministry of the gospel was neglected. Knowledge of faith and of the spiritual realm was destroyed. Christian righteousness was equated with that external government which the pope had created. Then the popes began grabbing an empire for themselves.³² They transferred kingships.³³ They harassed the rulers of almost all the nations of Europe, but especially the emperors of Germany, with unjust excommunications³⁴ and wars:³⁵ sometimes to occupy Italian cities³⁶ and other times to bring the German bishops into subjection and to deprive the emperors of the right to appoint bishops.³⁷ Indeed, it is even written in the Clementines: “When the imperial office falls vacant, the pope is the legitimate successor.”³⁸

30 The bull *Unam Sanctam* (1301). It reads in part: “However, spiritual power ought to excel the earthly ever so much in dignity and ability. . . . For the truth witnesses that the spiritual power has the earthly power to establish and to judge the earthly if it has not been good. . . .”

31 Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 22, chap. 1.

32 The roots of the papal state go back to the early Middle Ages, but a new stage in the consolidation of its power was accomplished shortly before the Reformation by Pope Alexander VI, his son Cesare Borgia, and Pope Julius II. Key among the documents used over the centuries to legitimate the pope’s claims to territory was the spurious Donation of Constantine, the authenticity of which some humanist scholars and the reformers had already questioned.

33 Between 1077 and 1346 the papacy set up four German counter-kings.

34 Among German kings and emperors: Henry IV, excommunicated and deposed by Gregory VII (1076, 1080) and excommunicated by Urban II (1094); Henry V, excommunicated by Gelasius II (1118); Frederick I, excommunicated by Alexander III (1160); Philip of Swabia and Otto IV, excommunicated by Innocent III (1201 and 1210, respectively); Frederick II, excommunicated by Gregory IX (1227, 1239) and excommunicated and deposed by Innocent IV (1245); Konradin, excommunicated by Clement IV (1267); Ludwig of Bavaria, excommunicated and deposed by John XXII (1324, 1327) and Clement VI (1346). Also, John the Landless of England, excommunicated by Innocent III (1208) and deposed (1212); Boniface VIII’s unsuccessful attempt to excommunicate and depose Philip IV of France (1303).

35 1495–96 against Charles VIII of France; 1511–13 against Louis XII of France; 1526–29 against Emperor Charles V.

36 There was especially intense conflict over the possession of various Italian territories between the papacy and the Hohenstaufen emperors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

37 The reference is to the Investiture Controversy, which ended with the Concordat of Worms (1122).

38 *Corpus juris canonici Clementinae* II, ii, c. 2.

Thus, the pope, contrary to the command of Christ,³⁹ has not only violated sovereignty but even exalted himself tyrannically over all rulers. In this matter the act itself is not as despicable as the fact that he uses the authority of Christ as a pretext, that he transfers the keys [cf. Matt. 16:19*] to worldly dominion, and that he binds salvation to these impious and heinous opinions, claiming it is necessary for salvation that people believe this tyranny belongs to the pope by divine right. Because these monstrous errors obscure faith and the reign of Christ, under no circumstances can they be ignored. Truly the results show what great plagues they have been in the church.

Concerning the third article,⁴⁰ this must be added: Even if the Roman bishop possessed primacy and superiority by divine right, one would still not owe obedience to those pontiffs who defend ungodly forms of worship, idolatry, and teaching inimical to the gospel. On the contrary, one should regard such pontiffs and such rule as anathema. So Paul clearly teaches: “If . . . an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed” [Gal. 1:8*]. Again, in Acts [5:29*]: “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” The canons also clearly teach that a heretical pope is not to be obeyed.⁴¹ The Levitical high priest was supreme by divine right. Nevertheless, ungodly high priests were not to be obeyed; Jeremiah and other prophets dissented from them. The apostles dissented from Caiaphas and were not obliged to obey him. It is well known, however, that the Roman pontiffs and their minions defend ungodly doctrines and worship practices. Moreover, the marks of the Antichrist clearly fit the reign of the pope and his minions. For describing the Antichrist to the Thessalonians, Paul calls him an adversary of Christ who “exalts himself above every so-called

39 Mark 10:42*, 43*.

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¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

[Matthew 16:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

40 The reference is to the third of the three papal claims listed in par. 3.

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⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!

[Galatians 1:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.

[Acts 5:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

41 Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 40, chap. 6.

god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God” [2 Thess. 2:4*]. He is speaking, therefore, of someone reigning in the church, not of pagan rulers, and calls that one an adversary of Christ because he will invent doctrine that conflicts with the gospel and will arrogate to himself divine authority. First of all, the pope clearly reigns in the church and has established this dominion for himself on the pretext of the authority of the church and the ministry, offering as justification the words, “I will give you the keys” [Matt. 16:19*]. Next, papal teaching contradicts the gospel at numerous points, and the pope arrogates to himself divine authority in three ways. First, he assumes the right to alter Christ’s teaching and the worship instituted by God, and he wants his own doctrine and worship regarded as divine. Second, he claims not only the power to loose and bind in this life but also authority over souls after this life.⁴² Third, the pope is not willing to be judged by the church or by anyone else and places his authority above the judgment of councils and of the whole church.⁴³ To refuse to be judged by the church or by anyone is to make himself God. Finally, he defends these dreadful errors and this wickedness with the greatest savagery, killing those who dissent.⁴⁴

This being the situation, all Christians must beware lest they become participants in the ungodly teachings, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the pope. Indeed, they ought to abandon and curse the pope and his minions as the realm of the Antichrist, just as Christ commanded: “Beware of false prophets” [Matt. 7:15*]. Paul also commanded that ungodly teachers are to be

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⁴ He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.

[2 Thessalonians 2:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

[Matthew 16:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

42 Cf. SA III, 3, 26.

43 See Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 40, chap. 6; II, chap. 9, q. 3, c. 13; Leo X’s bull *Pastor aeternus* (1516). Already by the end of the fifth century Pope Gelasius (d. 496) had asserted, “The pope is to be judged by no one.”

44 The first Protestant martyrs were two Augustinians from Antwerp, Henry Vos and John van den Esschen, executed in Brussels, 1 July 1523. See Luther’s hymn of commemoration from that time (WA 35:411–15; LW 53:211–16).

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¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

shunned and denounced as accursed,⁴⁵ and in 2 Corinthians 6[:14*] he says: “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what fellowship is there . . . between light and darkness?”

To dissent from the consensus of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grave matter. However, divine authority commands all people not to be accomplices and defenders of ungodliness and unjust cruelty. Thus, our consciences are sufficiently absolved. For the errors of papal rule are manifest, and the Scriptures cry out with one voice that those errors are the teaching of demons and of the Antichrist.⁴⁶ Idolatry is evident in the desecration of Masses, which, in addition to other vices, are shamelessly used for completely disgraceful profit. The doctrine of repentance has been utterly corrupted by the pope and his minions, for they teach that sins are forgiven on account of the worth of our works. Then they command us to doubt whether forgiveness has occurred. Nowhere do they teach that sins are pardoned freely for Christ’s sake and that by this faith we obtain the remission of sins. Thus they obscure the glory of Christ, rob consciences of sure consolation, and destroy true worship, that is, the exercise of faith wrestling with despair.⁴⁷

They have obscured the doctrine of sin and fashioned a tradition regarding the enumeration of transgressions which has spawned many errors and much despair. To this they joined satisfactions, with which they also have obscured the benefit of Christ.⁴⁸ From these came indulgences—unadulterated lies concocted for profit. And then the invocation of saints; how many abuses and what horrible idolatry has it caused? How many shameful acts have arisen from the tradition of celibacy? With what darkness has the teaching about vows eclipsed the gospel! They have pretended that a vow constitutes righteousness before God and merits forgiveness of sins. Thus they have transferred the benefit of Christ to human traditions and have completely destroyed the doctrine of faith. Utterly worthless traditions they have passed off as worship of God and the way of perfection and given them preference over the work of the vocations that

[Matthew 7:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

45 Titus 3:10* and Galatians 1:8–9*.

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¹⁴ Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?

[2 Corinthians 6:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

46 1 Timothy 4:1* and 2 Thessalonians 2:4*.

47 German: “the exercise of faith which fights against unbelief and despair over the promise of the gospel.” The issue was raised already in 1518 by Cardinal Cajetan during the proceedings at Augsburg (WA 2:13–16; LW 31:270–74).

48 On the traditional division of the sacrament of penance into contrition, confession, and satisfaction, see SA III, 3, 21.

God does require and has ordained. These errors are not to be taken lightly. Truly they do harm to the glory of Christ and bring souls to ruin. They cannot be ignored.

One must then add two enormous sins to these errors. The first is that the pope defends them with oppressive cruelty and punishments. The other is that the pope wrests the power of judging from the church and does not allow ecclesiastical controversies to be properly decided. Indeed, he maintains that he is superior to a council and can rescind conciliar decrees, as now and then the canons impudently state.⁴⁹ That the pontiffs did this in even more impudent fashion is attested by many examples.⁵⁰ The ninth question of the third canon states: “No one shall judge the principal see, for the judge is judged neither by the emperor, nor by all the clergy, nor by kings, nor by the people.”⁵¹ Thus the pope exercises a double tyranny: he defends his errors with violence and murder, and he forbids judicial inquiry. The latter does more harm than any cruel act. For when the church has been deprived of valid judicial process, it is not possible to remove ungodly teachings and impious forms of worship, and they destroy countless souls generation upon generation.

Therefore, godly persons should consider such great errors and the tyranny of the pope’s rule, and they should know first of all that they are to reject these errors and to embrace true doctrine for the sake of the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Then let them also ponder how grave a sin it is to abet unjust cruelty in murdering the saints, whose blood God will surely avenge.

It is especially necessary for the most eminent members of the church, the kings and princes, to attend to the church and take care that errors are removed and consciences restored to health, just as God expressly exhorts them: “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth” [Ps. 2:10*]. The first concern of kings should be to promote the glory of God. It would, therefore, be most shameful for them to use their authority and power to encourage idolatry and countless other disgraceful acts and to slaughter the saints.

Even if the pope held councils, how can the church be restored to health if the pope permits nothing to be decreed against his will, if he grants no one the right to express an opinion—except his minions, whom he has bound by terrible oaths⁵² and curses to defend his tyranny and ungodliness, the Word of God notwithstanding? Since, however, judgments of the councils are

49 See Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 16, 17, 19, 21; Gregory IX, *Decretalium* IX, 1, 6 c. 4.

50 See the bull *Execrabilis* of Pius II (1460), in which appeals to a future council are condemned.

51 Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 9, q. 3, c. 13.

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¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

[Psalm 2:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

52 The reference is to the oath of allegiance to the pope that was eventually required of all bishops.

judgments of the church, not of the pontiffs, it is wholly appropriate that rulers restrain the wantonness of the pontiffs and ensure that the power to examine and to make judgments according to the Word of God is not snatched away from the church. And as other Christians are obliged to censure the rest of the pope's errors, so must they rebuke him when he avoids and obstructs the church's inquiry and true judgment.

Therefore, even if the Roman bishop did possess primacy by divine right, obedience is still not owed him when he defends ungodly worship and teaching contrary to the gospel. Indeed, it is necessary to oppose him as the Antichrist.

The errors of the pope are blatant, and they are not trivial. The cruelty that he inflicts on godly persons is also manifest. And the command of God is certain that we should flee idolatry, ungodly teaching, and unjust violence. Therefore, all the godly have good, compelling, and clear reasons not to submit to the pope. These reasons console them in the face of all the reproaches for causing scandal, schism, and discord, with which they are regularly taunted.

Truly, those who agree with the pope and defend his teaching and worship practices defile themselves with idolatry and blasphemous opinions, make themselves guilty of the blood of the godly whom the pope persecutes, offend the glory of God, and undermine the well-being of the church because they confirm errors and other disgraces for all posterity.

The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops

In the Augsburg Confession and Apology⁵³ we have set forth in general what needs to be said about ecclesiastical power. The gospel bestows upon those who preside over the churches the commission to proclaim the gospel, forgive sins, and administer the sacraments. In addition, it bestows legal authority, that is, the charge to excommunicate those whose crimes are public knowledge and to absolve those who repent. It is universally acknowledged, even by our opponents, that this power is shared by divine right by all who preside in the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops. For that reason Jerome⁵⁴ plainly teaches that in the apostolic letters all who preside over churches are both bishops and presbyters. He quotes Titus [1:5–6*]: “I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should . . . appoint presbyters⁵⁵

53 CA XXVIII and Ap XXVIII.

54 Jerome, Epistle 146 (to Evangelus the Presbyter; *MPL* 22:1193–94; *NPNF*, ser. 2, 6:288–89).

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⁵ I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you:

⁶ someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious.

in every town,” which then continues, “It is necessary for a bishop to be the husband of one wife” [v. 6*]. Again, Peter and John call themselves presbyters.⁵⁶ Jerome goes on to say: “One person was chosen thereafter to oversee the rest as a remedy for schism, lest some individuals draw a following around themselves and divide the church of Christ. For in Alexandria, from the time of Mark the evangelist until that of bishops Esdras⁵⁷ and Dionysius, the presbyters always chose one of their number, elevated him to a higher status, and called him bishop. Moreover, in the same way that an army provides a commander for itself, the deacons may choose one of their own, whom they know to be diligent, and name him archdeacon. What, after all, does a bishop do, with the exception of ordaining, that a presbyter does not?”⁵⁸

Jerome, then, teaches that the distinctions of degree between bishop and presbyter or pastor are established by human authority. That is clear from the way it works, for, as I stated above, the power is the same. One thing subsequently created a distinction between bishops and pastors, and that was ordination, for it was arranged that one bishop would ordain the ministers in a number of churches. However, since the distinction of rank between bishop and pastor is not by divine right, it is clear that an ordination performed by a pastor in his own church is valid by divine right.

As a result, when the regular bishops become enemies of the gospel or are unwilling to ordain, the churches retain their right to do so. For wherever the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the church to retain the right to call, choose, and ordain ministers.

This right is a gift bestowed exclusively on the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church, as Paul testifies to the Ephesians [4:8*, 11*, 12*] when he says: “When

55 NRSV: “elders.”

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⁶ someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious.

Titus 1:6 (NRSV)

56 1 Peter 5:1* (NRSV: “elder”); 2 John 1; 3 John 1 (NRSV: “elder”).

57 Melancthon uses the text as cited in Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 93, chap. 24, which in numerous editions read “Esdras” instead of the correct “Heracles.”

58 Epistle to Evangelus.

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⁸ Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

he ascended on high . . . he gave gifts to his people.” Among those gifts belonging to the church he lists pastors and teachers and adds that such are given for serving and building up the body of Christ. Therefore, where the true church is, there must also be the right of choosing and ordaining ministers, just as in an emergency even a layperson grants absolution and becomes the minister or pastor of another. So Augustine tells the story of two Christians in a boat, one of whom baptized the other (a catechumen) and then the latter, having been baptized, absolved the former.⁵⁹ Pertinent here are the words of Christ that assert that the keys were given to the church, not just to particular persons: “For where two or three are gathered in my name . . .” [Matt. 18:20*].

Finally this is also confirmed by Peter’s declaration [1 Peter 2:9*]: “You are a . . . royal priesthood.” These words apply to the true church, which, since it alone possesses the priesthood, certainly has the right of choosing and ordaining ministers. The most common practice of the church also testifies to this, for in times past the people chose pastors and bishops. Then the bishop of either that church or a neighboring one came and confirmed the candidate by the laying on of hands. Ordination was nothing other than such confirmation. Later, new ceremonies were

[Ephesians 4:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

[Ephesians 4:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

[Ephesians 4:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

59 Gratian, *Decretum* III, dist. 4, chap. 36, cited there as a letter from Augustine to Fortunatus.

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²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

[Matthew 18:20 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[1 Peter 2:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

added, many of which Dionysius⁶⁰ describes, but he is a recent and fictitious author, whoever he is, just as the writings of Clement are counterfeit.⁶¹ Then more recent authors added, “I give to you the power to sacrifice for the living and the dead,”⁶² which is not even found in Dionysius.

All this evidence makes clear that the church retains the right to choose and ordain ministers. Consequently, when bishops either become heretical or are unwilling to ordain, the churches are compelled by divine right to ordain pastors and ministers for themselves. Moreover, the cause of this schism and dissension is to be found in the ungodliness and tyranny of the bishops, for Paul warns that bishops who teach and defend false doctrine and impious forms of worship are to be considered accursed.⁶³

We have spoken of ordination, which is the one thing, as Jerome states, that distinguishes bishops from the rest of the presbyters. There is no need, therefore, to discuss the other duties of bishops. Nor, to be sure, is there any need to speak of confirmation⁶⁴ or the blessing of bells, which are practically the only functions they have retained. However, something must be said about legal jurisdiction.

It is certain that the common legal authority to excommunicate those guilty of manifest crimes belongs to all pastors. In tyrannical fashion, the bishops have transferred this solely to themselves and used it for profit. It is evident that the so-called bureaucrats⁶⁵ have acted with intolerable license and, out of greed or other lusts, have harassed and excommunicated people without any proper judicial process. What kind of tyranny is this that these bureaucrats have the power to excommunicate people arbitrarily without a proper trial? And in what kinds of matters have they abused this power? Not in punishing real offenses but in violations of fasts or festivals and similar nonsense. Now and then they punished cases of adultery, but in such matters they often harassed innocent and honest people. Moreover, because this is a very serious charge, certainly no one should be condemned without due process. Since, therefore, the bishops have tyrannically reserved this jurisdiction for themselves and have shamefully abused it, there is no need to obey them as far as it is concerned. On the contrary, since we have just cause for not

60 The reference is to the late-fifth-century Syrian work, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, chap. 5. The humanist scholars Lorenzo Valla and Desiderius Erasmus had attacked its authenticity.

61 The *Recognitions*, attributed to Clement of Rome (d. ca. 100), but dating at the earliest to the end of the second century.

62 A paraphrase of the formula in the ordination rite whereby the bishop conveys to the priest the power to celebrate the sacrificial Mass.

63 Galatians 1:7–9*.

64 Here the reference is to the Roman sacrament of confirmation.

65 Administrative officers in episcopal chancelleries who were responsible for the administration of justice, particularly in marital and disciplinary cases.

submitting, it is right to restore this jurisdiction to godly pastors and to take care that it be exercised legitimately for the amendment of morals and the glory of God.

Still to be considered is the administration of justice in those cases that, according to canon law, belong to what they call ecclesiastical courts, especially marital cases. This jurisdiction the bishops also possess by human right, and they have not had it very long, for it appears from the *Codex* and *Novellae* of Justinian⁶⁶ that formerly the adjudication of marital matters belonged to the magistrates. Moreover, secular authorities are compelled by divine law to exercise this authority if the bishops are negligent. The canons concede as much.⁶⁷ Therefore, it is not necessary to obey the bishops with regard to this jurisdiction either. Indeed, since they have made certain unjust laws concerning marriage and apply them in their courts, the establishment of other judicial processes is required on these grounds as well. For the traditions concerning spiritual relationship are unjust,⁶⁸ as is the tradition that prohibits remarriage of an innocent party after divorce.⁶⁹ Unjust, too, is the law that in general approves all secret and deceitful betrothals in violation of the rights of parents.⁷⁰ The law requiring celibacy of priests is also unjust. These ecclesiastical laws hold more snares for consciences, but there is no need to recite them all here. It is enough to have made it clear that there are many unjust papal laws concerning marriage and that on this account the magistrates must establish other courts.

Whereas the bishops, who are beholden to the pope, defend ungodly doctrine and ungodly worship and do not ordain godly teachers but abet the pope's violence instead; whereas, moreover, they have taken jurisdiction away from pastors and in tyrannical fashion exercise it alone; whereas, finally, in marital matters they enforce many unjust laws: therefore, these constitute many sufficient and necessary causes why the churches should not acknowledge them as bishops. They themselves ought to remember that wealth has been given to bishops as alms for the administration and benefit of the churches, as the rule states, "The benefice is given for the office."⁷¹ Thus, they cannot possess these alms with a good conscience. Meanwhile, they are defrauding the church, which has need of these resources to support ministers, education, and poor relief and to establish courts, especially for marital cases. So great are the variety and number of marital controversies that they need a special forum, the creation of which requires the

66 Justinian Code, the codification of imperial Roman law by Emperor Justinian, V, 1–27.

67 Gregory IX, *Decretalium* V, 26 c. 2.

68 German: "the prohibition of marriage between baptismal sponsors is unjust." See Gregory IX, *Decretalium* IV, 11.

69 The church Fathers based their position forbidding remarriage after divorce on Matthew 5:32*; Mark 10:11*; Luke 16:18*. See Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 32, q. 7, c. 1–8, 10.

70 Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 30, q. 5, c. 1–3. See, for example, Luther's 1530 tract *On Marriage Matters* (WA 30/3: 205–48; LW 46:259–320).

71 *Corpus juris canonici*, bk. VI, I, 3, c. 15.

church's wealth.⁷² Peter [2 Peter 2:13–15*] foretold the appearance of future ungodly bishops who would squander the churches' alms on luxury and neglect the ministry. Therefore, let those who defraud the church know that God will exact punishment for their sin.

List of the Doctors and Preachers Who Subscribed to the Confession and Apology, 1537

By the command of the most illustrious princes and of the estates and cities confessing the Evangelical teaching, we have reread the articles of the Confession presented to the emperor at the Diet of Augsburg and, by the grace of God, all those present at this assembly in Smalcald unanimously declare that in their churches they believe and teach in accordance with the articles of the Confession and Apology. They also declare that they approve the article concerning the primacy of the pope and his authority and the power and jurisdiction of bishops, which was presented to the princes at this assembly in Smalcald. Accordingly, they sign their names.

I, DR. JOHN BUGENHAGEN, of Pomerania, sign the articles of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and the article concerning the papacy presented to the princes at Smalcald

I, DR. URBANUS RHEGIUS, superintendent of the churches in the duchy of Lueneburg, also sign

NICHOLAS VON AMSDORF, of Magdeburg, signed

GEORGE SPALATIN, of Altenburg, signed

I, ANDREW OSIANDER, sign

MASTER VEIT DIETRICH, of Nuremberg, signs

STEPHEN AGRICOLA, preacher in Hof, signed with his own hand

⁷² Such a court was established in Wittenberg in 1539.

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¹³ suffering the penalty for doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their dissipation while they feast with you.

¹⁴ They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!

¹⁵ They have left the straight road and have gone astray, following the road of Balaam son of Bosor, who loved the wages of doing wrong,

JOHN DRACONITES, of Marburg, signed

CONRAD FIGENBOTZ subscribes to all herein

MARTIN BUCER

I, ERHARD SCHNEPF, sign

I, PAUL VON RHODE, preacher in Stettin

GERHARD OEMCKEN, minister of the church in Minden

BRIXIUS NORTHANUS, preacher in Soest

SIMON SCHNEEWEISS, parish pastor in Crailsheim

I, Pomeranus [JOHN BUGENHAGEN], sign again in the name of Master John Brenz, as he charged me

PHILIP MELANCHTHON signs with his own hand

ANTHONY RABE signs with his own hand both in his name and in the name of Adam [Krafft] of Fulda

JOHN SCHLAGENHAUFEN signs with his own hand

GEORGE HELT of Forchheim

MICHAEL CAELIUS, preacher in Mansfeld

PETER GELTNER, preacher in the church in Frankfurt

DENNIS MELANDER signed

PAUL FAGIUS of Strasbourg

WENDELL FABER, parish pastor of Seeburg in Mansfeld

CONRAD OETTINGER of Pforzheim, preacher to Duke Ulrich of Württemberg

BONIFACE WOLFART, minister of the Word in the church in Augsburg

JOHN AEPINUS, superintendent in Hamburg, etc., signed with his own hand

JOHN [TIMANN] of Amsterdam, [pastor] in Bremen, did the same

JOHN FONTANUS, superintendent of Lower Hesse, signed

FREDERICK MYCONIUS signed for himself and for Justus Menius

AMBROSE BLARER

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²Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. 2000. *The Book of Concord : The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* . Fortress Press: Minneapolis