

The Augsburg Confession

Editors' Introduction to the Augsburg Confession

In 1521 the Holy Roman emperor, Charles V, outlawed Martin Luther and his teaching at the imperial Diet of Worms and ordered the suppression of all attempts to reform the church in his lands according to Luther's program for reformation. Throughout the 1520s princes and cities intent on introducing that program jockeyed for political position with imperial and Roman Catholic forces within the assemblies (diets) of the empire, at Nuremberg (1522, 1523) and Speyer (1526, 1529). As a result of the ambiguous edict of the 1526 Diet of Speyer, where German princes promised to carry out the Edict of Worms according to their own consciences, Elector John of Saxony undertook a formal visitation of the parishes in his territory without permission from the local Roman Catholic bishop. In this connection Philip Melanchthon, aided by Martin Luther and John Bugenhagen, Wittenberg's head pastor, published in 1528 doctrinal guidelines for Saxony's pastors, entitled *Instructions by the Visitors*. At the diet in Speyer in 1529 Charles had corrected the ambiguity of the earlier edict directed against the spread of the Lutheran reform. This elicited a formal appeal or "protestatio" (testimony or confession) from Luther's princely supporters.

Charles wanted to marshal support for his war against Turkish imperial forces, which had laid siege to Vienna in 1529; he was in conflict with France, and he wanted to consolidate his own power within Germany at the expense of the relatively independent territorial princes. The emperor also was concerned about the life of the church and interested in promoting a moral and institutional reform. At the same time he despised the doctrinal reformation Luther had set in motion. Therefore, after negotiations with Pope Clement VII in Bologna in January 1530, he called for the Lutheran princes and cities to explain their religious program before an imperial diet, which he called for late spring in the city of Augsburg. In preparation for this diet Elector John of Saxony commissioned his theologians, led by Luther and Melanchthon, to prepare working papers on the issues that had led to reform in the Saxon and other territorial churches influenced by Luther's teaching. The so-called Torgau Articles, named after the Saxon town where some work on them was completed, developed in a series of drafts and treated the subjects of human ordinances, marriage of priests, both kinds (bread and wine) in the Lord's Supper, the sacrifice of the Mass, confession, ecclesiastical jurisdiction, ordination, monastic vows, invocation of saints, and use of the vernacular in worship.

Because he had been declared an outlaw by the emperor in 1521, Luther dared not travel to Augsburg, where he would certainly have been arrested and perhaps executed by Charles's forces. Instead, Melanchthon headed the Saxon theologians who went to the diet. In Augsburg he was greeted by a new publication, edited by John Eck, professor at Ingolstadt, one of the

brightest and best of Roman Catholic theologians in Germany at the time and a sworn enemy of the Wittenbergers. This assembly of *Four Hundred Four Propositions* presented citations from Luther, Melanchthon, and their colleagues mixed with a wide range of statements from others who were criticizing the church, including Antitrinitarians and Anabaptists as well as Ulrich Zwingli and others who shared his rejection of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. By grouping them together with the Wittenberg theologians, Eck gave the impression that the Saxon theology affirmed most heresies known to the church. Melanchthon recognized that the Lutherans would have to do more than address the issues of reform. They would also have to demonstrate their own orthodoxy and catholicity. Therefore, he constructed a confession—changing its name from “apologia” (defense)—of twenty-one articles on doctrinal topics and seven articles on reform efforts. In so doing he sought to show that the theology taught in Wittenberg remained true to the catholic tradition, both by stating the biblical truth and by condemning false teachings also rejected by Roman Catholic opponents. He drew the doctrinal positions for this confession from articles prepared for a league of Lutheran governments in summer 1529, the Schwabach Articles, expanding them (especially in CA XX) to meet Eck's most serious charges. To complete formulating the doctrinal articles of the confession, he appropriated material from the Marburg Articles, composed as a result of the colloquy between the Wittenbergers and Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich along with his Swiss colleagues in October 1529; Luther's own summary of his faith in the third section of his *Confession concerning Christ's Supper* (1528); and the *Instruction by the Visitors*. To the doctrinal articles composed on the basis of these documents, he added a revised version of the earlier Saxon drafts concerning abuses that needed reforming.

In Augsburg, Zwingli himself sent his own *Ratio fidei* (Ground of Faith) to the emperor, and four cities, Strasbourg, Memmingen, Lindau, and Constance, under the leadership of Martin Bucer, presented the *Confessio Tetrapolitana*.

After several weeks of intensive negotiations with representatives of the Roman Catholic princes and bishops as well as the emperor, seven Lutheran princes and two municipal governments subscribed Melanchthon's “Confession” and presented it to the emperor and the assembled princes and representatives of imperial cities in the diet on 25 June 1530. Chancellor Christian Beyer of Elector John's government read the German text to the diet, and his voice carried its words into the street outside. In accord with the imperial instructions, Melanchthon had also prepared a Latin version of the Confession that was handed over to Charles at the same time.

Further negotiations followed. At the same time, Roman Catholic theologians commissioned by the emperor formulated a “Confutation” of this Confession. By accepting this document the emperor rejected the Lutheran claim to legitimacy, and at the end of the diet he commanded the Lutheran governments to return to the Roman obedience by 15 April 1531, or face suppression.

The text of the Augsburg Confession was published by 1531.¹ Because of its acceptance as a kind of “mission statement” for the Evangelical churches, Melanchthon felt an obligation to continue to improve it, and variations in the German text appeared in the second edition (1533), and the Latin text was altered at certain points in the third (1540) and fourth (1542) editions.

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To the 1531 *editio princeps* Philip Melanchthon added the following preface (*MBW* 1103 = *CR* 2:445–47), written in mid-November 1530 and published in May 1531. “This confession was published six months ago by some greedy printer without the knowledge of the princes who had presented it to the emperor. It was printed in such a fashion that in many places it appears to have been intentionally corrupted. However, because the princes—even if they wanted to—cannot wrest it from the public’s hands, and because it would be dangerous lest those defects of the first edition produce new false accusations, it was necessary to edit it, reexamining and correcting it again. For this concerns not only the honor of princes but also religion—chiefly so that falsified writings of this kind are not broadcast widely under their titles. Wherefore we now publish a correctly and diligently written confession from bona fide copies. We have also added an Apology, which was also submitted to his Imperial Majesty. For we were afraid that in the future the confession would be edited even less favorably than it has been.

“However, although our adversaries do not want to be placated, we nevertheless hope that all good and prudent people, wherever in the world these books are read, will understand that we profess no dogma contrary to the authority of Holy Scripture and the catholic church. Instead our people censure by the best of rights some abuses and shed light on the chief topics of Christian doctrine, which had become obscured at this time by the most pernicious opinions. Concerning the righteousness of faith up until now all churches, monasteries, schools, indeed all the books of recent theologians, were silent. In the doctrine of repentance [*poenitentia*: see *CA* XII, n. 65], certain and firm consolation for consciences was nowhere handed down. No one taught that sins are forgiven through faith in Christ. The doctrine of satisfactions was slaughtering consciences. The sacraments were impiously profaned once the opinion was accepted that they justified *ex opere operato* [see *CA* XIII, n. 75]. In turn, this opinion oppressed the doctrine of faith and produced manifold idolatry. Human traditions were more than labyrinths, because they were increased infinitely: partly with Judaic and superstitious interpretations, partly with tyrannical ones. After this, a relaxation in traditions was compared to a complaint. Our people censured these vices, not so that they might dissolve church government, but so that they may show forth and restore the gospel to its original purity and so that they may console godly consciences.

“Now they cannot desert the defense of the truth, since Christ says [Matt. 10:32–33*], ‘Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.’ Now therefore we beseech all good people that they do not judge us only on the basis of the writings and clamorings of our adversaries, who try to cloud the truth with amazing tricks and lies, but instead that—as is most fair—they listen to us, too, and examine the entire case, concerning which—because it pertains to the glory of God, to religion, and to the salvation of souls—no one ought to be ignorant.”

These changes became controversial in the 1560s when the tenth article of this “*Confessio Augustana Variata*” was used by Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate to justify the spiritualizing doctrine of the Lord’s Supper that his theologians were propagating under Genevan influence. Thus, those who opposed this position insisted on the “*Confessio Augustana Invariata*,” the original text of the 1531 *editio princeps*.

The Augsburg Confession

German Text

The Augsburg Confession.

Confession of Faith by Certain Princes

and Cities Presented to His Imperial Majesty

in Augsburg in the Year 1530.¹

Preface²

Most serene, most mighty, invincible Emperor, most gracious Lord. A short time ago, Your Imperial Majesty graciously summoned an imperial diet to convene here in Augsburg.³ The summons indicated an earnest desire, first, to deliberate concerning matters pertaining to “the Turks, that hereditary foe of ours and of the Christian name,” and how this foe “might be effectively resisted with unwavering help”; and second, to deliberate “and diligently to consider how we may act concerning the dissension in the holy faith and Christian religion and to hear, understand, and consider with love and graciousness everyone’s judgment, opinion, and beliefs among us, to unite the same in agreement on one Christian truth, and to lay aside whatever may not have been rightly interpreted or treated by either side, so that all of us can accept and

1 The title from the 1531 *editio princeps*.

2 Drafted by the Saxon electoral chancellor Gregory Brück, based on three drafts: an original version written by a secretary with Brück’s corrections, probably produced in Coburg; a fragment from Philip Melanchthon’s own hand; and a translation of a Latin version submitted to the Nuremberg representatives before the Diet of Augsburg. See the texts in *BSLK* 35–43. The translation of the preface matches the stilted German style of the Saxon and imperial chancelleries.

3 21 January 1530.

preserve a single, true religion. Inasmuch as we are all enlisted under one Christ, we are all to live together in one communion and in one church.”⁴ Because we, the undersigned elector and princes, including our associates as well as other electors, princes, and estates,⁵ have been summoned for these purposes, we have complied and can say, without boasting, that we were among the first to arrive.⁶

Moreover, Your Imperial Majesty graciously, most diligently, and earnestly desired,⁷ in reference to the most humble compliance with the summons and in conformity to it, as well as in the matters pertaining to the faith, that each of the electors, princes, and estates should commit to writing, in German and Latin, his judgments, opinions, and beliefs concerning said errors, dissensions, and abuses, etc. Accordingly, after due consideration and counsel, it was proposed to Your Imperial Majesty last Wednesday¹⁰ that, in keeping with Your Majesty’s wish, we should present our case in German and Latin today, Friday.¹¹ Wherefore, in most humble obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, we offer and present a confession of our pastors’ and preachers’ teachings¹² as well as of our faith, setting forth on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture what and in what manner they preach, teach, believe, and give instruction in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities, and territories.

If the other electors, princes, and estates also submit a similar written statement of their judgments and opinions, in both Latin and German, we are quite willing, in complete obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, our most gracious Lord, to discuss with them and their associates—as far as this can be done in fairness—such practical and equitable ways as may unite us. Thus, the matters at issue between the parties may be presented in writing on both sides; they may be negotiated charitably and amicably; and these same differences may be so explained as to unite us in one, true religion, since we are all enlisted under one Christ and should confess Christ. All of this may be done in consequence of Your Imperial Majesty’s aforementioned summons and in

4 The material in quotation marks reproduces the actual language of the imperial summons.

5 *Stände*. Territorial princes and representatives of municipalities who had special status as delegates to the “diets,” or parliamentary assemblies of the empire. These assemblies were made up of seven princes called “electors” (they elected the emperor), other princes, and representatives of specific “imperial cities” (*Reichsstädte*).

6 Elector John of Saxony and Landgrave Philip of Hesse arrived in Augsburg in the first half of May 1530, ahead of the emperor, Charles V, who came on 15 June.

7 At the formal opening of the diet on 20 June 1530.

10 On 22 June, when it was decided to deal with the issue of religious dissension before the matter of raising taxes for waging war against the Ottoman Empire.

11 On 24 June. At the last minute the presentation was postponed until Saturday, 25 June.

12 Pastors and preachers held distinct offices in German congregations of the sixteenth century.

accord with divine truth. We, therefore, invoke God Almighty in deepest humility and pray for the gift of his divine grace to this end. Amen!

If,¹³ however, our lords, friends, and associates who represent the electors, princes, and estates of the other party, do not comply with the procedure intended by Your Imperial Majesty's summons, so that no charitable and amicable negotiations take place among us, and if they are not fruitful, we on our part shall not have failed in anything that can or may serve the cause of Christian unity, as far as God and conscience allow. Your Imperial Majesty as well as our aforementioned friends, the electors, princes, estates, and every lover of the Christian religion who is concerned about these matters, will be graciously and sufficiently assured of this by what follows in the confession which we and our people submit.

In the past, Your Imperial Majesty graciously intimated to the electors, princes, and estates of the empire, especially in a public instruction¹⁴ at the Diet of Speyer in the year 1526, that, for reasons there stated, Your Imperial Majesty was not disposed to render a decision in matters pertaining to our holy faith, but would urge the pope¹⁶ to call a council. Again, by means of a written instruction at the last diet in Speyer a year ago, the electors, princes, and estates were, among other things, informed and notified by Your Imperial Majesty's viceroy, His Royal Majesty of Hungary and Bohemia, etc., and by Your Imperial Majesty's orator¹⁷ and appointed commissioners, "that Your Imperial Majesty's viceroy,¹⁸ deputy,¹⁹ and councilors of the imperial government, together with representatives of the absent electors, princes, and estates who were assembled at the diet convened at Regensburg,²⁰ had considered the proposal for a general council²¹ and acknowledged that it would be fruitful to have one called. Since, then, the negotiations between Your Imperial Majesty and the pope resulted in a good, Christian understanding,²² so that Your Imperial Majesty was certain that the pope would not refuse to call

13 The following sections (par. 12–23) reflect the position of Philip of Hesse and to some extent the language of instructions to his representatives, dated 27 March 1530.

14 Originally sent to Ferdinand, the brother of the emperor, archduke of Austria, and since 1526 king of Hungary and Bohemia.

16 Clement VII.

17 That is, by Ferdinand and by the imperial vice-chancellor, Balthasar Merklin.

18 Margrave Philip of Baden.

19 Count Wolfgang of Montfort.

20 The Diet of Regensburg in 1527 was poorly attended and adjourned without accomplishing much.

21 An assembly of bishops chaired by the pope, the traditional instrument for making decisions on matters of faith and morals.

22 The Peace of Barcelona in 1529, followed by an alliance in the same year and the coronation of the emperor in February 1530.

such a council, Your Imperial Majesty graciously offered to promote and arrange for the calling of such a general council by the pope, along with Your Imperial Majesty, at the earliest opportunity without putting any obstacles in the way.”²³

In this case, therefore, we offer in full obedience to Your Imperial Majesty even beyond what is required: to participate in such a general, free, Christian council, as the electors, princes, and estates have requested, with high and noble motives, in all the diets of the empire that have been held during Your Imperial Majesty’s reign. We also have, following legal form and procedure, called upon and appealed to such a council and to Your Imperial Majesty at various times concerning these most important matters.²⁴ We now once again adhere to these actions, and neither these nor any subsequent negotiations shall make us waver (unless the matters in dissension are in a charitable and friendly manner finally heard, considered, settled, and result in Christian unity, according to Your Imperial Majesty’s summons), as we herewith make public witness and appeal. This is our confession and that of our people, article by article, as follows.

Articles of Faith and Doctrine

[I. Concerning God]²⁶

In the first place, it is with one accord taught and held, following the decree of the Council of Nicea,²⁷ that there is one divine essence²⁸ which is named God and truly is God. But there are three persons in the same one essence, equally powerful, equally eternal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are one divine essence, eternal, undivided, unending, of immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness, the creator and preserver of all visible and invisible things. What is understood by the word “person” is not a part nor a quality in another but that which exists by itself, as the Fathers once used the word concerning this issue.²⁹

23 The material in quotes reflects a proposal delivered at the second Diet of Speyer on 15 March 1529.

24 At the Diet of Speyer on 25 April 1529 before two imperial lawyers.

26 The titles of Articles I–XIX and XXI, here enclosed in square brackets, were first inserted into some printings after 1532. They were also not a part of the 1580 Book of Concord. Most manuscripts do not number these articles.

27 The Nicene Creed.

28 *Wesen*: essence or being.

29 The terms *hypostasis* in Greek and *persona* in Latin were used by early Christian theologians (“the Fathers”) to repudiate “modalism,” which regarded the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three modalities or manifestations of the one God.

Rejected, therefore, are all the heresies that are opposed to this article, such as the Manichaeans,³⁰ who posited two gods, one good and one evil; the Valentinians,³¹ the Arians,³² the Eunomians,³³ the Mohammedans,³⁴ and all others like them; also the Samosatensians, old and new,³⁵ who hold that there is only one person and create a deceitful sophistry about the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, by saying that the two need not be two distinct persons since “Word” means an external word or voice and the “Holy Spirit” is a created motion in all creatures.

[II. Concerning Original Sin]

Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin³⁷ is truly sin and condemns to God’s eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Rejected, then, are the Pelagians³⁸ and others who do not regard original sin as sin in order to make human nature righteous through natural powers, thus insulting the suffering and merit of Christ.

30 Followers of Mani, who was crucified in Persia for teaching a religious pluralism featuring the conflict between good and evil in an elaborate system of ideas with Christian, Buddhist, and other elements.

31 Named after Valentinus, who linked Christian ideas with polytheistic gnostic teachings.

32 Followers of Arius, who was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325. He taught that the Son was created and was of a different “substance” from the Father.

33 Followers of Eunomius, an extreme Arian who taught that the Son was unlike the Father in essence.

34 Followers of Mohammed, the founder of Islam. The Lutheran reformers frequently referred to Islam as an Antitrinitarian heresy. In the sixteenth century the word *Mohammedan* was not understood pejoratively.

35 Followers of Paul of Samosata, who taught that Jesus was not divine in his nature but was a man specially endowed by the Holy Spirit. Among the “new Samosatensians” was John Campanus,

37 *Erbsünde*, the traditional word for “original sin,” meaning “hereditary sin.”

38 Followers of Pelagius, who taught that one can be saved by an act of will aided by God’s grace. The “others” included scholastic theologians, such as Gabriel Biel and the reformers’ contemporary opponents. Compare Luther’s *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* of 1528 (WA 26:503, 25–34; LW 37:363).

[III. Concerning the Son of God]

Likewise, it is taught that God the Son became a human being, born of the pure Virgin Mary, and that the two natures, the divine and the human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ.³⁹ He is true God and true human being who truly “was born, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried” in order both to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to conciliate God’s wrath.⁴⁰ Moreover, the same Christ “descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, is sitting at the right hand of God” in order to rule and reign forever over all creatures, so that through the Holy Spirit he may make holy, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, also distribute to them life and various gifts and benefits, and shield and protect them against the devil and sin. Finally, the same Lord Christ “will come” in full view of all “to judge the living and the dead . . .,” according to the Apostles’ Creed.⁴¹ *Rejected are all heresies that are opposed to this article.*⁴²

[IV. Concerning Justification]

Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ’s sake through faith⁴⁶ when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21–26*] and 4[:5*].

39 Compare the Decree of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (*NPNF*, ser. 2, 14:264–65).

40 See CA XXIV.21–22.

41 The material in quotes reflects the wording of the Apostles’ Creed.

42 The text in italics was first added to the 1531 *editio princeps*, which was regarded as the authentic edition for much of the sixteenth century. This and other additions are not found in the 1580 Book of Concord.

46 German: *durch den Glauben*. In German, the preposition *durch* denotes both instrument (“through”) and means (“by”). Translating “through faith” here and elsewhere does not contradict the fact that the reformers also held that “faith justifies.”

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²¹ But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets,

²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

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

*[V. Concerning the Office of Preaching]*⁴⁷

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.

Condemned are the Anabaptists⁴⁸ and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external⁴⁹ word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.

[VI. Concerning the New Obedience]

It is also taught that such faith should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God's sake but not place trust in them as if thereby

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;

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 3:21–26 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

[Romans 4:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁴⁷ Although later numbered as a separate article, grammatically this is a continuation of the preceding.

⁴⁸ "Rebaptizers" (from the Greek *anabaptizein*), who initially arose in Zurich, where they dissented from Ulrich Zwingli, that city's chief preacher. They rejected infant baptism in favor of an adult "believers' baptism." Most, however, adhered to the authority of the "external word of the gospel." The Lutheran reformers did not distinguish Anabaptists from spiritualists, such as Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeld, who taught that one could receive the Holy Spirit without means. The "others" may have included, in the reformers' opinion, followers of scholastic theologians like Gabriel Biel, who held that the Holy Spirit was first merited by natural human powers apart from the means of grace.

⁴⁹ *leiblich*: literally, physical.

to earn grace before God.⁵⁰ For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ himself says [Luke 17:10*]: “When you have done all [things] . . . , say, ‘We are worthless slaves.’ ” The Fathers also teach the same thing. For Ambrose says: “It is determined by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved and have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit.”⁵¹

[VII. Concerning the Church]

It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously⁵⁵ according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. As Paul says in Ephesians 4[:4–5*]: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

50 Compare CA XX.3 and XXVI.2.

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¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’ ”

Luke 17:10 (NRSV)

51 Actually pseudo-Ambrose, often called Ambrosiaster, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1:4 (MPL 17:195). This is the oldest Latin commentary on the letters of Paul, dating from the late fourth century and attributed to Ambrose, one of the renowned “fathers” of the Western church. Most theologians of the sixteenth century did not think that this attribution was mistaken.

55 *Einträchtiglich*. In CA I.1 it is translated “with one accord.”

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⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,

⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

Ephesians 4:4–5 (NRSV)

*[VIII. What Is the Church?]*⁵⁶

Likewise, although the Christian church is, properly speaking, nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even public sinners remain among the righteous, the sacraments—even though administered by unrighteous priests—are efficacious all the same.⁵⁷ For as Christ himself indicates [Matt. 23:2–3*]: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. . . .”

Condemned, therefore, are the Donatists⁵⁸ and all others who hold a different view.

[IX. Concerning Baptism]

Concerning baptism it is taught that it is necessary, that grace is offered through it, and that one should also baptize children, who through such baptism are entrusted to God and become pleasing to him.

Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the baptism of children is not right.⁵⁹

*[X. Concerning the Lord’s Supper]*⁶⁰

56 This article is, grammatically speaking, a continuation of the preceding.

57 This speaks to an issue raised during the 1529 Marburg Colloquy against Ulrich Zwingli. See WA 30/3: 157, 1–15; LW 38:81.

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² “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat;

³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.

[Matthew 23:2–3 \(NRSV\)](#)

58 Named after Donatus, a North African bishop. Donatists denied the validity of the ministry of those who had become unfaithful under Roman persecution. Although the Donatist schism did not last long, its rigorist standards of ministry were often revived in Christian history. “Others” here may include some Anabaptists, who argued that baptism received from a “false” priest was invalid. See Luther, *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528) (WA 26:506, 13–21; LW 37:366) and *Concerning Rebaptism* (1528) (WA 26:163, 11–25; LW 40:250).

59 For the Anabaptists, see above, n. 51. In his *404 Articles*, nos. 227–33, John Eck accused the reformers of being Anabaptists and Donatists.

Concerning the Lord's Supper it is taught that the true body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form⁶¹ of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper and are distributed and received there. Rejected, therefore, is also the contrary teaching.⁶²

[XI. Concerning Confession]

Concerning confession it is taught that private absolution⁶³ should be retained and not abolished. However, it is not necessary to enumerate all misdeeds and sins,⁶⁴ since it is not possible to do so. Psalm 19[12*]: "But who can detect their errors?"

[XII. Concerning Repentance]⁶⁵

Concerning repentance it is taught that those who have sinned after baptism obtain forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance and that absolution should not be denied them by the church. Now properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than⁶⁶ to have contrition and

60 *Heiliges Abendmahl*, the traditional term for "Lord's Supper," meaning "holy evening meal."

61 *Gestalt*, a term for the bread and wine, used here as the German equivalent for the Latin *species*, which already was associated with the doctrine of transubstantiation at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.

62 All teachings that deny the bodily presence of Christ, especially the views of Luther's colleague Andrew Bodenstein, called "Karlstadt," of Ulrich Zwingli, and of Caspar Schwenckfeld. They regarded Holy Communion as an unrepeatable historical event (Karlstadt), as a memorial of Christ's death (Zwingli), or as a spiritual encounter with Christ as "heavenly flesh" (Schwenckfeld).

63 *privata absolutio*, using the Latin technical term for receiving personal forgiveness after confession of sins to a priest.

64 Required by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, chap. 21. The Council decreed that only those going to private confession were to be admitted to the sacrament.

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

Psalm 19:12 (NRSV)

65 *Buße, poenitentia*. These words, which long had been used to designate the sacrament of penance, were consistently taken by the reformers to mean "repentance" or "penitence." See the first four of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* (1517) (WA 1:233; LW 31:25–26).

66 The phrase "nothing else than" is omitted in the 1580 Book of Concord.

sorrow, or terror about sin, and yet at the same time to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ. Such faith, in turn, comforts the heart and puts it at peace. Then improvement should also follow, and a person should refrain from sins. For these should be the fruits of repentance, as John says in Matthew 3[:8*]: “Bear fruit worthy of repentance.”

Rejected here are those who teach that whoever has once become righteous cannot fall again.⁶⁷

However, also condemned are the Novatians,⁷¹ who denied absolution to those who had sinned after baptism.

Also rejected are those who do not teach that a person obtains forgiveness of sin through faith but through our own satisfactions.⁷²

*Also rejected are those who teach that “canonical satisfactions”⁷³ are necessary to pay for eternal torment or purgatory.*⁷⁴

[XIII. Concerning the Use of Sacraments]

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⁸ Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

[Matthew 3:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

67 The Lutheran reformers cited some Anabaptists, like Hans Denck, and some spiritualists, like Caspar Schwenckfeld, as representatives of such teaching.

71 Followers of Novatian, the leader of a rigorist schismatic movement in Rome. They denied restoration, even after repentance, to those who were guilty of grave sins.

72 Medieval theologians divided the sacrament of penance into three parts: contrition (sorrow for sin), confession (before a priest), and satisfaction (good works done to satisfy the temporal punishment for sin after the guilt and eternal punishment had been removed by the grace of the sacrament).

“Satisfactions” became linked to medieval abuses, such as the selling of indulgences, which Luther opposed in his *Ninety-five Theses* of 1517 (WA 1:233–38; LW 31:25–33). In the 1531 *editio princeps* this text reads: “. . . do not teach that we obtain forgiveness of sins through faith apart from our merit for the sake of Christ, but instead that we earn it through our work and love.”

73 *Canonicae satisfactiones*: satisfactions demanded by canon law.

74 The text in italics was first added to the 1531 *editio princeps*.

Concerning the use of sacraments it is taught that the sacraments are instituted not only to be signs by which people may recognize Christians outwardly, but also as signs and testimonies of God's will toward us in order thereby to awaken and strengthen our faith. That is why they also require faith and are rightly used when received in faith for the strengthening of faith.

Rejected, therefore, are those who teach that the sacraments justify ex opere operato⁷⁵ without faith and who do not teach that this faith should be added so that the forgiveness of sin (which is obtained through faith and not through work) may be offered there.⁷⁶

[XIV. Concerning Church Government]⁷⁷

Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call.⁷⁸

[XV. Concerning Church Regulations]⁸²

Concerning church regulations made by human beings, it is taught to keep those that may be kept without sin and that serve to maintain peace and good order in the church, such as specific celebrations, festivals, etc. However, people are also instructed not to burden consciences with them as if such things were necessary for salvation. Moreover, it is taught that all rules and traditions made by human beings for the purpose of appeasing God and of earning grace are contrary to the gospel and the teaching concerning faith in Christ. That is why monastic vows and other traditions concerning distinctions of foods, days, and the like,⁸³ through which people

⁷⁵ *ex opere operato*: "by the mere performance of an act," a formula used since the thirteenth century to describe the power of the external action in the celebration of sacraments. When the officiating priest performs the sacramental action exactly the way the church has ordered (for example, consecrating the bread and wine in the Mass), the sacrament becomes efficacious.

⁷⁶ The text in italics was first added to the 1531 *editio princeps*.

⁷⁷ *Kirchenregiment*.

⁷⁸ *On ordentlichen Beruf*. *Beruf* means both "call" and "vocation." The 1531 *editio princeps* and the 1580 Book of Concord add the word in brackets.

⁸² *Kirchenordnungen*. In this article, the 1531 *editio princeps* and the 1580 Book of Concord use the singular, *Kirchenordnung* (church order).

⁸³ Holy days and festivals, echoing Colossians 2:16* (compare CA XXVI.25 and XXVIII.43–45). Among Lutherans at this time numerous saints' days were abolished and apostles' days were sometimes transferred to the succeeding Sundays. But many of the festivals of the church year were retained. Compare the booklet written by Luther, Melancthon, and others, *Instruction for the Visitors* (1528) (WA 26:222, 8–225, 8, and 227, 40–228, 31; LW 40:297–301, 304–5).

imagine they can earn grace and make satisfaction for sin, are good for nothing and contrary to the gospel.

[XVI. Concerning Public Order and Secular Government]⁸⁴

Concerning public order and secular government it is taught that all political authority,⁸⁵ orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God and that Christians may without sin exercise political authority; be princes and judges; pass sentences and administer justice according to imperial and other existing laws; punish evildoers with the sword; wage just wars; serve as soldiers; buy and sell; take required oaths; possess property; be married; etc.

Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian.⁸⁶

Also condemned are those who teach that Christian perfection means physically leaving house and home, spouse and child, and refraining from the above-mentioned activities.⁸⁷ In fact, the only true perfection is true fear of God and true faith in God. For the gospel teaches an internal, eternal reality⁸⁸ and righteousness of the heart, not an external, temporal one. The gospel does not overthrow secular government, public order, and marriage but instead intends that a person keep all this as a true order of God and demonstrate in these walks of life⁹¹ Christian love and true good works according to each person's calling. Christians, therefore, are obliged to be subject to political authority and to obey its commands and laws in all that may be done without sin. But if a command of the political authority cannot be followed without sin, one must obey God rather than any human beings (Acts 5[:29*]).

84 *Polizei* (public order), derived from the Greek *politeia*, "public administration." *Weltliches Regiment* (secular government): compare Luther, *On Temporal Authority* (1523) (WA 11:245–80; LW 45:81–129). This term is translated throughout as "secular."

85 *Obrigkeit*.

86 Anabaptists refused to participate in secular government or to take oaths but approved of marriage and some forms of private property.

87 A reference to monasticism. See also CA XXVII.

88 *Wesen*.

91 *Stände*. Here, the aforementioned secular government, public order, and marriage; otherwise the term also includes offices within the church and reflects the threefold division of society according to widely accepted medieval social theory into *ecclesia* (church), *politia* (government), and *oeconomia* (household).

[XVII. Concerning the Return of Christ to Judgment]

It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment.

Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the devils and condemned human beings will not suffer eternal torture and torment.⁹²

Likewise rejected are some Jewish teachings, which have also appeared in the present, that before the resurrection of the dead saints and righteous people alone will possess a secular kingdom and will annihilate all the ungodly.⁹³

[XVIII. Concerning Free Will]

Concerning free will it is taught that a human being has some measure of free will, so as to live an externally honorable life and to choose among the things reason comprehends. However, without the grace, help, and operation of the Holy Spirit a human being cannot become pleasing to God, fear or believe in God with the whole heart, or expel innate evil lusts from the heart. Instead, this happens through the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God. For Paul says (1 Cor. 2[:14*]): “Those who are natural do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit.”⁹⁴

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

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

⁹² Some Anabaptists, among them Hans Denck and Melchior Rinck, taught that everyone will be saved in the end. Compare Luther’s *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528) (WA 26:509, 13–18; LW 37:372). The reformers considered the Anabaptists to be followers of Origen. See the Schwabach Articles XIII.

⁹³ Compare Acts 1:6*. Radical Dutch Anabaptists tried to establish such a “kingdom” in Münster in 1535, and the spiritualist Thomas Müntzer called for the annihilation of the ungodly during the German peasant revolt in 1525. On 30 March 1530 an Anabaptist, Augustine Bader, was executed in Stuttgart for predicting that a thousand-year kingdom would begin that Easter.

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¹⁴ Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

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

In order that it may be recognized that nothing new is taught here, these are the clear words of Augustine concerning free will, quoted here from the third book of the *Hypognosticon*:⁹⁵ “We confess that there is a free will in all human beings. For all have a natural, innate mind and reason—not that they can act in matters pertaining to God, such as loving or fearing God with their whole heart—but they do have the freedom to choose good or evil only in the external works of this life. By ‘good’ I mean what can be done by nature: whether to work in the field or not, whether to eat and drink, whether to visit a friend or not, to dress or undress, to build a home, to marry, to engage in a trade, and to do whatever may be useful and good. To be sure, all of this neither exists nor endures without God, but everything is from him and through him. On the other hand, a human being can by personal choice do evil, such as to kneel before an idol, commit murder, and the like.”

*Rejected here are those who teach that we can keep the commandments of God without grace and the Holy Spirit. For although we are by nature able to do the external works of the commandments, yet we cannot do the supreme commandments in the heart, namely, truly to fear, love, and believe in God.*⁹⁶

[XIX. Concerning the Cause of Sin]

Concerning the cause of sin it is taught among us that although almighty God has created and preserves all of nature, nevertheless the perverted will causes sin in all those who are evil and despise God. This, then, is the will of the devil and of all the ungodly. As soon as God withdrew his hand, it turned from God to malice, as Christ says (John 8[:44*]): “When [the devil] lies, he speaks according to his own nature.”⁹⁷

94 Cited here according to the alternative reading in the NRSV, which corresponds to the German and Latin texts.

95 *Admonition against Pelagians and Celestinians (Hypomnesticon contra Pelagianos et Coelestinianos)* III, 4, 5 (MPL 45:1623), ascribed to Augustine in older collections of his works. The Celestinians are named after Celestius, a disciple of Pelagius.

96 The text in italics was first added to the 1531 *editio princeps*.

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⁴⁴ You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

[John 8:44](#) (NRSV)

97 An allusion to the arguments in Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 13 (MPL 44:889–90; *NPNF*, ser. 1, 5:449).

[XX.] Concerning Faith and Good Works⁹⁸

Our people are falsely accused of prohibiting good works. But their writings concerning the Decalogue⁹⁹ and other writings demonstrate that they have given good and useful account and admonition concerning proper Christian walks of life and works, about which little had been taught before our time. Instead, for the most part childish, unnecessary works—such as rosaries, the cult of the saints, joining religious orders, pilgrimages, appointed fasts, holy days, brotherhoods,¹⁰³ and the like—were emphasized in all sermons. Our opponents also no longer praise such unnecessary works as highly as they once did. Moreover, they have also learned to speak now of faith, about which they did not preach at all in former times. Rather, they now teach that we do not become righteous before God by works alone, but they add faith in Christ, saying that faith and works make us righteous before God. Such talk may offer a little more comfort than the teaching that one should rely on works alone.

Because at present the teaching concerning faith, which is the principal part of the Christian life, has not been emphasized for such a long time, as all must admit, but only a doctrine of works was preached everywhere, our people have taught as follows:

In the first place, our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace. Instead, this happens through faith alone when a person believes that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who alone is the mediator to reconcile the Father. Now all who imagine that they can accomplish this by works and can merit grace despise Christ and seek their own way to God contrary to the gospel.

This teaching about faith is publicly and clearly treated in Paul at many places, especially in Ephesians 2[:8–9*]: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. . . .”

98 Different from an earlier draft, entitled *Faith and Works* (BSLK 75–81) and written in late May or early June 1530. The 1531 *editio princeps* (BSLK 82–83) contains some variations on this article without changing the substance.

99 For example, Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works* (1520) (WA 6:202–76; LW 44:21–114), and the Small and Large Catechisms.

103 Societies for laymen who practiced devotional exercises and good works.

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⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—

⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

That no new interpretation is introduced here can be demonstrated from Augustine, who diligently deals with this matter and also teaches that we obtain grace and become righteous before God through faith in Christ, and not through works. His whole book *On the Spirit and the Letter*¹⁰⁴ proves it.

Now although untested people despise this teaching completely, it is nevertheless the case that it is very comforting and beneficial for timid and terrified consciences. For the conscience cannot find rest and peace through works but by faith alone, when it concludes on its own with certainty that it has a gracious God for Christ's sake, as Paul says (Rom. 5[:1*]): "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God."

In former times people did not emphasize this comfort but instead drove the poor consciences to their own works. As a result, all sorts of works were undertaken. For the conscience forced some into monasteries, in the hope of obtaining grace there through the monastic life. Some devised other works as a way of earning grace and making satisfaction for sins. Many of them discovered that a person could not obtain peace by such means. That is why it became necessary to preach this teaching concerning faith in Christ and diligently to emphasize it, so that each person may know that God's grace is grasped by faith alone, without merit.

We must also explain that we are not talking here about the faith possessed by the devil and the ungodly,¹⁰⁷ who also believe the story that Christ suffered and was raised from the dead. But we are talking about true faith, which believes that we obtain grace and forgiveness of sin through Christ.

All who know that in Christ they have a gracious God call upon him and are not, like the heathen, without God. For the devil and the ungodly do not believe this article about the forgiveness of sin. That is why they are enemies of God, cannot call upon him, and cannot hope for anything good from him. Moreover, as has now been indicated, Scripture talks about faith but does not label it knowledge such as the devil and the ungodly have. For Hebrews 11[:1*] teaches that faith is not only a matter of historical knowledge, but a matter of having confidence in God

104 For example, *On the Spirit and the Letter* XIX, 34 (CSEL 60:187, 22; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:97).

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¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

[Romans 5:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

107 An allusion to James 2:19*.

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¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

[Hebrews 11:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

to receive his promise. Augustine¹⁰⁸ also reminds us that we should understand the word “faith” in Scripture to mean confidence in God—that God is gracious to us—and not merely such knowledge of these stories as the devils also have.

Further, it is taught that good works should and must be done, not that a person relies on them to earn grace, but for God’s sake and to God’s praise. Faith alone always takes hold of grace and forgiveness of sin. Because the Holy Spirit is given through faith, the heart is also moved to do good works. For before, because it lacks the Holy Spirit, the heart is too weak. Moreover, it is in the power of the devil who drives our poor human nature to many sins, as we observe in the philosophers who tried to live honestly and blamelessly, but then failed to do so and fell into many great, public sins. That is what happens to human beings when they are separated from true faith, are without the Holy Spirit, and govern themselves through their own human strength alone.¹⁰⁹

That is why this teaching concerning faith is not to be censured for prohibiting good works. On the contrary, it should be praised for teaching the performance of good works and for offering help as to how they may be done. For without faith and without Christ human nature and human power are much too weak to do good works: such as to call on God, to have patience in suffering, to love the neighbor, to engage diligently in legitimate callings, to be obedient, to avoid evil lust, etc. Such lofty and genuine works cannot be done without the help of Christ, as he himself says in John 15[:5*]: “Apart from me you can do nothing.”

[XXI. Concerning the Cult of the Saints]

Concerning the cult of the saints our people teach that the saints are to be remembered so that we may strengthen our faith when we see how they experienced grace and how they were helped by faith. Moreover, it is taught that each person, according to his or her calling, should take the saints’ good works as an example. For instance, His Imperial Majesty, in a salutary and righteous fashion, may follow the example of David in waging war against the Turk.¹¹⁶ For both hold a

108 A reference perhaps to Augustine’s *Homilies on the Epistle of John to the Parthians* (*Tract. in Ep. Joh. ad Parthenos*) X, 2 (MPL 34:2055; NPNF, ser. 1, 7:521), and to a medieval tract ascribed to Augustine, *Concerning the Knowledge of the True Life* (*De cognitione verae vitae*) 37 (MPL 40:1025).

109 “Human beings” is in the singular in the German text.

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⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

[John 15:5](#) (NRSV)

116 The Evangelical party at Augsburg wanted to appear firm in its support of the empire’s military efforts. See the preface to the CA, 1.

royal office that demands defense and protection of their subjects. However, it cannot be demonstrated from Scripture that a person should call upon the saints or seek help from them. “For there is only one single reconciler and mediator set up between God and humanity, Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 2[:5*]).¹¹⁷ He is the only savior, the only high priest, the mercy seat,¹¹⁸ and intercessor before God (Rom. 8[:34*]). He alone has promised to hear our prayers. According to Scripture, in all our needs and concerns it is the highest worship to seek and call upon this same Jesus Christ with our whole heart. “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous . . .” [1 John 2:1*].

[Conclusion of Part One]

This is nearly a complete summary of what is preached and taught in our churches for proper Christian instruction and the comfort of consciences, as well as for the improvement of believers. For we certainly wish neither to expose our own souls and consciences to grave danger before God by misusing the divine name or Word nor to pass on or bequeath to our children and descendants any other teaching than that which accords with the pure Word of God and Christian truth. Since, then, this teaching is clearly grounded in Holy Scripture and is, moreover, neither against nor contrary to the universal¹¹⁹ Christian church—or even the Roman church—so far as

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⁵ For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human,

1 Timothy 2:5 (NRSV)

117 A paraphrase of 1 Timothy 2:5* that does not correspond to the German or Latin texts of the day.

118 *Gnadenstuhl*, referring to Exodus 25:17* and Romans 3:25*, also translated as “sacrifice” or “place of atonement.”

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³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Romans 8:34 (NRSV)

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¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

1 John 2:1 (NRSV)

119 *Gemeine*, old German for *allgemein*, universal. Here the linguistic equivalent of the Latin *catholica*.

can be observed in the writings of the Fathers,¹²⁰ we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above. That is why those who undertake to isolate, reject, and avoid our people as heretics, without having themselves any solid basis in divine command or Scripture, act in a very unfriendly and hasty manner, contrary to all Christian unity and love. For the dissension and quarrel are chiefly over some traditions and abuses.¹²² Since, then, there is nothing unfounded or deficient in the principal articles and since this our confession is godly and Christian, the bishops should in all fairness act more leniently even if there were a deficiency in regard to tradition—although we hope to offer solid grounds and reasons why some traditions and abuses have been changed among us.

Disputed Articles, Listing the Abuses That Have Been Corrected

Nothing contrary to Holy Scripture or to the universal, Christian church is taught in our churches concerning articles of faith. Rather, only some abuses have been corrected that in part have crept in over the years and in part have been introduced by force. Necessity demands that we list them and indicate reasons why correction is permissible in these matters so that Your Imperial Majesty may recognize that we have not acted in an unchristian or sacrilegious manner. On the contrary, we have been compelled by God's command (which is rightly to be esteemed higher than all custom) to permit such corrections.

[XXII.] Concerning Both Kinds¹²³ of the Sacrament

Among us both kinds of the sacrament are given to the laity for the following reason. There is a clear order and command of Christ in Matthew 26[:27*]: “Drink from it, all of you.” Concerning the cup Christ here commands with clear words that they all should drink from it.

120 The renowned teachers of the ancient Western church, such as Ambrose and Augustine. This phrase also anticipates the extensive use of Gratian's collection of canon law.

122 Lacking in the 1531 *editio princeps*.

123 *Gestalt*. See above, n. 61.

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²⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you;

[Matthew 26:27](#) (NRSV)

So that no one can contest and interpret¹²⁴ these words as if they only applied to priests, Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 11[:21*] that the whole assembly of the Corinthian church used both kinds. Moreover, this usage remained in the church for a long time, as can be demonstrated from the historical accounts and from the writings of the Fathers.¹²⁵ Cyprian mentions in many places that the cup was given to the laity in his time.¹²⁶ St. Jerome says that the priests who administer the sacrament distribute the blood of Christ to the people.¹²⁷ Pope Gelasius himself ordered that the sacrament should not be divided (dist. 2, chap. *Concerning Consecration*).¹²⁹ Not a single canon with the order to receive only one kind can be found. Nobody knows when or through whom this custom of receiving only one kind was introduced, although Cardinal Cusanus mentions when this custom was formally approved.¹³⁰ Now it is obvious that this custom, introduced contrary to God's command and to the ancient canons, is not right. Accordingly, it was not proper to burden the consciences of those who desired to use the sacrament according to Christ's institution and to compel them to act contrary to the order of our Lord Christ. Furthermore, because dividing the sacrament contradicts Christ's institution, the customary procession with the sacrament has also been discontinued.¹³¹

124 *Glossieren*, from the Latin *glossa*, a marginal note, interlineation, or commentary on a text; a traditional medieval way of interpreting a text by adding short explanations to clarify difficult phrases.

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²¹ For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.

1 Corinthians 11:21 (NRSV)

125 Histories of the church show that the cup was generally given to the laity until the thirteenth century.

126 Cyprian, Epistle 57.2 (*CSEL* 3/2: 652, 7; *ANF* 5:337, where it is Epistle 53.2).

127 Jerome, *Commentary on Zephaniah*, c. 3 (*MPL* 25:1375).

129 Gratian, *Decretum*, pt. III, *Concerning Consecration (de consecratione)*, dist. 2, chap. 12. This collection of canon law was falsely ascribed to Pope Gelasius I. Gratian collected and edited church regulations, which since 1582 have been known as the *Code of Canon Law (Corpus Juris Canonici)*.

130 Nicholas of Cusa, Epistle III to the Bohemians, shows that the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 ordered the withdrawal of the cup from the laity.

131 A reference to the observance of the Corpus Christi festival on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday. Lutheran princes refused to participate in the Corpus Christi procession in Augsburg on 16 June 1530. Even "carrying the sacrament across the street" was later forbidden. However, see *LW* 54:407f. (*WATR* 5, no. 5314).

[XXIII.] Concerning the Marriage of Priests

From everyone, both of high and low degree, a mighty, loud complaint has been heard throughout the world about the flagrant immorality and dissolute life of priests who were not able to remain chaste; their vices reached the height of abomination. In order to avoid so much terrible offense, adultery, and other immorality, some priests among us have entered the married state. They give as their reason that they are compelled and moved to do so by the great distress of their consciences, especially since Scripture clearly proclaims that the married state was instituted by God to avoid sexual immorality, as Paul says that to avoid immorality, “Each man should have his own wife” [1 Cor. 7:2*], and again, “For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” [1 Cor. 7:9b*]. When Christ says, in Matthew 19[:11*], “Not everyone can accept this teaching,” he shows that he knew human nature quite well, namely, that few people have the gift to live a celibate life. For “God created humankind . . . male and female” (Gen. 1[:27*]). Experience has made it all too clear whether human power and ability can improve or change the creation of God, the supreme Majesty, through their own intentions or vows without a special gift or grace of God. What good, honorable, chaste life, what Christian, honest, or upright existence has resulted for many? For it is clear—as many have confessed about their own lives—how much abominable, terrifying disturbance and torment of conscience they experienced at the time of their death. Therefore, because God’s Word and command cannot be changed by any

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² But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

[1 Corinthians 7:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁹ But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

[1 Corinthians 7:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹¹ But he said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given.

[Matthew 19:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

[Genesis 1:27 \(NRSV\)](#)

human vow or law, priests and other clergy have taken wives for themselves for these and other reasons and causes.

It can also be demonstrated from the historical accounts and from the writings of the Fathers that it was customary in the Christian church of ancient times for priests and deacons to have wives. This is why Paul says in 1 Timothy 3[:2*]: “Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife.”¹³³ It was only four hundred years ago that priests in Germany were compelled by force to leave the married state and take the vows of celibacy.¹³⁴ But they all offered so much serious and strong resistance that an archbishop of Mainz, who had promulgated the new papal decree, was nearly crushed to death during an uprising of the entire clergy.¹³⁵ In the beginning, this same prohibition was so hastily and ineptly enforced that the pope at the time prohibited not only future marriages of priests but also broke up existing marriages of long standing. Of course, this was not only contrary to all divine, natural, and civil laws but also was totally opposed and contrary to the canons that the popes themselves had made and to the most renowned councils.¹³⁶

Many godly and intelligent people of high standing have also often expressed similar opinions and misgivings that such enforced celibacy and prohibition of marriage (which God himself instituted and left open for individuals to enter) never introduced any good but rather many great and evil vices and much scandal. Moreover, as his biography indicates, one of the popes himself, Pius II, often said and had these words recorded: there may well have been some reason why the clergy was prohibited from marrying; but there were many better, greater, and

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² Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,

1 Timothy 3:2 (NRSV)

133 Here citing the alternative reading in the NRSV, which corresponds to the German and Latin texts.

134 Originally, priests were not permitted to marry a second time; then they could not marry after their priestly vows; and since the fourth century they had to refrain from marital relations altogether. However, it was not until the end of the eleventh century that the requirement of celibacy was generally enforced by Pope Gregory VII. At that time most priests in Germany were still married.

135 Siegfried of Mainz at synods in Erfurt and Mainz in 1075.

136 Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 82, chaps. 2–5; also dist. 84, chap. 4. The Council of Nicea in 325 refused to require celibacy. See Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* I, 11 (MPG 67:101–4; NPNF, ser. 2, 2:18).

more important reasons why they should again be free to marry.¹³⁷ Undoubtedly, Pope Pius, as an intelligent and wise man, made this statement because of grave misgivings.

Therefore, in loyalty to Your Imperial Majesty we are confident that, as a most praiseworthy Christian emperor, Your Majesty will graciously take to heart the fact that now in these last times and days of which Scripture speaks, the world is becoming more wicked and human beings more frail and infirm.

Therefore it is most necessary, useful, and Christian to give this situation thorough inspection, so that the prohibition of marriage may not cause worse and more shameful immorality and vices to gain ground in German lands. For no one will ever be able to change or arrange these matters better or more wisely than God himself, who instituted marriage to help human frailty and to prevent sexual immorality. The old canons also state that sometimes severity and rigor must be alleviated and relaxed for the sake of human weakness and to prevent and avoid greater scandal.¹³⁸ Now that certainly would be Christian and highly necessary in this case. How can the marriage of priests and clergy, especially of the pastors and others who are to serve the church, be disadvantageous to the Christian church as a whole? There may well be a shortage of priests and pastors in the future if this harsh prohibition of marriage should last much longer.

Thus, that priests and clergy may marry is based on the divine Word and command. Moreover, the historical accounts demonstrate that priests were married and that the vow of celibacy has caused so much awful, unchristian offense, so much adultery, such terrible, unprecedented immorality and abominable vice that even some of the sincere cathedral clergy and also some courtiers in Rome have often confessed and complained how such abominable and overwhelming vice in the clergy would arouse the wrath of God. It is, therefore, quite deplorable that Christian marriage has not only been prohibited but also most swiftly punished in many places, as if it were a great crime. And yet, God commanded in Holy Scripture to hold marriage in high esteem.¹³⁹ Moreover, the marital state is also highly praised in imperial laws and in all monarchies—wherever there has been law and justice. Only in this day and age are people beginning to be tortured without cause, simply because they are married—especially priests who above all should be spared. This is done not only contrary to divine law but also to the canons. In 1 Timothy 4[:1*, 3*] the apostle Paul calls the teaching that prohibits marriage a teaching of the

137 Pope Pius II is reported to have said this, according to the Italian humanist historian Bartholomeo Platina, *Concerning the Lives and Customs of the Popes (De vitis ac gestis pontificum)* (Venice, 1518), 155b.

138 Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 34, chap. 7; pt. II, chap. 1, q. 7, c. 5.

139 This sentence is lacking in the 1580 Book of Concord.

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¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

devil. Christ himself says in John 8[:44*] that the devil is a murderer from the beginning. These two statements fit well together. For it certainly must be a teaching of the devil to prohibit marriage and then to dare to maintain such a teaching with the shedding of blood.

However, just as no human law can abolish or change God's command, neither can any vow change God's command. That is why St. Cyprian advised that women who do not keep the vow of chastity should get married. He says in Epistle 11: "But if they are unwilling or unable to keep their vows of chastity it is better for them to marry than to fall into the fire through their lusts, and they should see to it that they cause no offense to their brothers and sisters."¹⁴⁰

In addition, all the canons show great lenience and fairness toward those who have made vows in their youth,¹⁴¹ as is the case with large numbers of priests and monks who entered their vocations out of ignorance when they were young.

[XXIV.] *Concerning the Mass*

Our people have been unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass.¹⁴² But it is obvious, without boasting, that the Mass is celebrated among us with greater devotion and earnestness

1 Timothy 4:1 (NRSV)

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³ They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

1 Timothy 4:3 (NRSV)

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⁴⁴ You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

John 8:44 (NRSV)

140 Cyprian, Epistle 62.2 (*ANF* 5:357, where it is numbered 61). The text uses the numbering of Cyprian's letters by the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. Other editions number it 4 (cf. *MPL* 4:366f. and *CSEL* 3/2: 474, 17–21).

141 Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 20, q. 1, c. 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15.

142 For example, by John Eck, *404 Theses*, nos. 269–78. Luther retained the Mass, but without abuses. See, for example, *Concerning the Order of Public Worship* (1523) (WA 12:35–37; LW 53:11–14) and *The German Mass and Order of Service* (1526) (WA 19:72–113; LW 53:53–90).

than among our opponents. The people are instructed more regularly and with the greatest diligence concerning the holy sacrament, to what purpose it was instituted, and how it is to be used, namely, as a comfort to terrified consciences. In this way, the people are drawn to Communion and to the Mass. At the same time, they are also instructed about other, false teaching concerning the sacrament.¹⁴³ Moreover, no noticeable changes have been made in the public celebration of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung alongside the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people. For after all, all ceremonies should serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ.

Now, because previously the Mass was misused in many ways (as has come to light) by turning it into a fair, by buying and selling it, and, for the most part, by celebrating it in all churches for money, such misuse was repeatedly rebuked by learned and upright people—even before our time.¹⁴⁴ Now the preachers among us preached about this, and the priests were reminded of the terrible responsibility, which should properly concern every Christian, that whoever uses the sacrament unworthily is “answerable for the body and blood” of Christ [1 Cor. 11:27*]. Consequently, such mercenary Masses and private Masses,¹⁴⁵ which had up to now been celebrated under compulsion for the sake of money and stipends, were discontinued in our churches.

At the same time, an abominable error was also rebuked, namely, the teaching that our Lord Jesus Christ had made satisfaction by his death only for original sin and had instituted the Mass as a sacrifice for other sins. Thus, the Mass was made into a sacrifice for the living and the dead for the purpose of taking away sin and appeasing God. Thereupon followed a debate as to whether one Mass celebrated for many people merited as much as a special Mass celebrated for an individual. This resulted in the countless multiplication of Masses, and with this work people wanted to obtain from God everything they needed. Meanwhile, faith in Christ and true worship of God were forgotten.

143 As an example of such instruction, see the Large Catechism, “The Lord’s Supper,” based on sermons by Luther delivered during Holy Week, 1529.

144 By various critics, such as Nicholas of Cusa, the German Dominican mystic John Tauler, the French conciliarist John Gerson, and the influential German theologian Gabriel Biel.

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²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:27 (NRSV)

145 Masses said for the special intentions of individuals, often called “votive Masses,” which were celebrated in connection with a vow (*votum* in Latin). Compare Luther’s *Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg* (1530) (WA 30/2: 293–309; LW 34:22–32).

That is why instruction was given, clearly of necessity, so that everyone would know how to use the sacrament properly. In the first place, Scripture demonstrates in many places that there is no other sacrifice for original sin or any other sin than the one death of Christ. For it is written in Hebrews [9:28*; 10:10*, 14*] that Christ offered himself once and thereby made satisfaction for all sins. It is an unprecedented novelty in church doctrine that Christ's death should have made satisfaction only for original sin and not for other sins as well. Consequently, we hope everyone understands that such error is not unjustly rebuked.¹⁴⁶

In the second place, St. Paul teaches that we obtain grace before God through faith and not through works. Clearly contrary to this is the misuse of the Mass where people imagine that they may obtain grace through performing this work. For everyone knows that the Mass is used for removing sin and obtaining grace and all benefits from God—not only for the priest himself but also for the whole world and for others, living or dead. *And this takes place through performing the work, ex opere operato, without faith.*¹⁴⁷

In the third place, the holy sacrament was not instituted to provide a sacrifice for sin—for the sacrifice has already occurred—but to awaken our faith and comfort our consciences. The sacrament makes them aware that they are promised grace and forgiveness of sin by Christ. That is why this sacrament requires faith and without faith is used in vain.

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²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

[Hebrews 9:28 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁰ And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

[Hebrews 10:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

[Hebrews 10:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

146 "It is an . . . rebuked": lacking in the 1531 *editio princeps*.

147 The text in italics was first added to the 1531 *editio princeps*. For the phrase *ex opere operato*, see above, n. 75.

Now since the Mass is not a sacrifice for others, living or dead, to take away their sins but should be a Communion where the priest and others receive the sacrament for themselves, we celebrate it in this fashion. On holy days and at other times when communicants are present, Mass is celebrated, and those who desire it receive the sacrament. Thus, the Mass remains among us in its proper use, as it was observed formerly in the church. This can be demonstrated from St. Paul (1 Cor. 11[:23–33*]) and from many writings of the Fathers. For Chrysostom tells how the priest stands every day and invites some to receive the sacrament, but forbids others to approach.¹⁴⁸ The ancient canons also indicate that one priest officiated and gave the sacrament to the other priests and deacons. For the words of the Nicene canon read: “After the priests, the deacons shall receive the sacrament from the bishop or priest in order.”¹⁴⁹

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²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,

²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.

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

²⁹ For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.

³⁰ For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged.

³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

1 Corinthians 11:23–33 (NRSV)

148 John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, Homily 3 (MPG 62:29; NPNF, ser. 1, 13:64).

149 Canon 18 of the Council of Nicea in 325.

No novelty has been introduced that did not exist in the church in days of old. No noticeable change has occurred in the public liturgy of the Mass, except that other, unnecessary Masses, which perhaps through misuse were celebrated besides the parish Mass, have been discontinued. Therefore this way of celebrating Mass should, in all fairness, not be condemned as heretical or unchristian. For in former times, Mass was not celebrated every day in the large churches where there were many people, even on days the people assembled. As the *Tripartite History*, Book 9, indicates, in Alexandria Scripture was read and interpreted on Wednesday and Friday, and all these worship services were held without the Mass.¹⁵⁶

[XXV.] *Concerning Confession*

Confession has not been abolished by the preachers on our side. For the custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved. At the same time, the people are diligently instructed how comforting the word of absolution is and how highly and dearly absolution is to be esteemed.¹⁵⁷ For it is not the voice or word of the person speaking it, but it is the Word of God, who forgives sin. For it is spoken in God's stead and by God's command. Great diligence is used to teach about this command and power of the keys, and how comforting and necessary it is for terrified consciences. It is also taught how God requires us to believe this absolution as much as if it were God's voice resounding from heaven and that we should joyfully find comfort in the absolution, knowing that through such faith we obtain forgiveness of sin. In former times, the preachers, while teaching much about confession, never mentioned a single word about these necessary matters but instead only tormented consciences with long enumerations of sins, with satisfactions, with indulgences, with pilgrimages, and the like. Moreover, many of our opponents themselves confess that our side has written about and dealt with true Christian repentance more appropriately than had been done in a long time.

Concerning confession, it is taught that no one should be compelled to enumerate sins in detail. For this is impossible, as the psalm [19:12*] says: "But who can detect their errors?" And

156 *Historia tripartita*, written by the Roman monk Cassiodorus, was the principal book of church history used in the late Middle Ages, and it quotes here from Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* V, 22 (MPG 67:635–40; NPNF, ser. 2, 2:132).

157 On requiring confession, see Luther, *An Order of Mass and Communion* (1523) (WA 12:215, 18–216, 19; LW 53:32f.), and *Instructions for the Visitors* (1528) (WA 26:220, 1–19; LW 40:296). On the comfort of absolution, see the Large Catechism, "A Brief Exhortation to Confession," 16–19.

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

Jeremiah [17:9*] says: “The human heart is so devious that no one can understand it.”¹⁵⁸ Miserable human nature is so mired in sins that it cannot see or know them all. If we were absolved only from those sins that we can enumerate, we would be helped but little. That is why it is not necessary to compel people to enumerate sins in detail. This was also the view of the Fathers, as one finds it in dist. 1 of *Concerning Confession*¹⁶⁰ where these words of Chrysostom are quoted: “I do not say that you should offer yourself up in public, or accuse yourself, or plead guilty before another person. Instead obey the prophet who says, ‘Reveal your way to the Lord’ [Ps. 37:5*, Vulgate]. Therefore confess to the Lord God, the true judge, in your prayer. Do not speak your sin with the tongue, but in your conscience.” Here one can clearly see that Chrysostom does not force anyone to enumerate sins in detail. The marginal note in the *Decretum, Concerning Confession*, dist. 5,¹⁶¹ also teaches that confession is not commanded in Scripture but was instituted by the church. Nevertheless, the preachers on our side diligently teach that confession is to be retained because of absolution (which is confession’s principal and foremost part) for the comfort of terrified consciences and because of other reasons.¹⁶²

[XXVI.] *Concerning the Distinction among Foods*

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⁹ The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it?

[Jeremiah 17:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

158 A paraphrase based on the Latin Vulgate. For this argument see also CA XI.

160 Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 33, q. 3 (*De poenitentia*, dist. 1, chap. 87, 4). The quotation is from Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, Homily 31.6 (*MPG* 63:216; *NPNF*, ser. 1, 14:508).

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⁵ Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.

[Psalm 37:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

161 A gloss to Gratian, *Decretum, De poenitentia* 5, 1. It reads: “It is better to say that it [confession] was instituted by some tradition of the universal church than from the authority of the Old or New Testament.”

162 See, for example, the appreciation of private confession by Luther, *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528) (WA 26:507, 17–27; LW 37:368–69).

In former times it was taught, preached, and written that distinction among foods and similar traditions instituted by human beings serve to earn grace and make satisfaction for sin.¹⁶³ For this reason, new fasts, new ceremonies, new monastic orders, and the like were invented daily. They were fervently and strictly promoted, as if such things were a necessary service of God whereby people earned grace if they observed them or committed a great sin if they did not. Many harmful errors in the church have resulted from this.

In the first place, the grace of Christ and the teaching concerning faith are thereby obscured. The gospel holds these things up to us with great earnestness and strongly insists that everyone regard the merit of Christ as sublime and precious and know that faith in Christ is to be esteemed far above all works. For this reason, St. Paul fought vehemently against the Law of Moses and against human tradition so that we should learn that we do not become righteous before God by our works but that it is only through faith in Christ that we obtain grace for Christ's sake. Such teaching has been almost completely extinguished by the instruction to earn grace with prescribed fasts, distinction among foods, dress, etc.

In the second place, such traditions have also obscured God's commands. For these traditions are placed far above God's commands. This alone was considered the Christian life: whoever observed festivals this way, prayed in this way, fasted in this way, and was dressed in this way was said to live a spiritual, Christian life. On the other hand, other necessary good works were considered secular, unspiritual ways of life: that each person is obliged to act according to his or her calling—for example, that the father of a family works to support his wife and children and raises them in the fear of God; that the mother of a family bears children and looks after them; that a prince or rulers govern a country; etc. Such works, commanded by God, had to be a “secular and imperfect” way of life, while the traditions had to have impressive names, so that only they were called “holy and perfect” works.¹⁶⁵ That is why there was no end or limit in the making of such traditions.

In the third place, such traditions turned out to be a heavy burden to consciences. For it was not possible to keep all the traditions, and yet people thought that keeping them was required for true service to God. Gerson writes¹⁶⁶ that many fell into despair doing this. Some even committed suicide because they had heard nothing about the comfort of Christ's grace. For reading the summists¹⁶⁷ and theologians discloses how consciences became confused when these

163 For example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II, 2, q. 147, a. 1. “Fasting is practiced for three principal reasons: first, to restrain the concupiscence of the flesh . . . , second . . . , because through it the mind is more easily elevated to the contemplation of sublime things . . . , third, to make satisfaction for sin.” (Thomas's *Summa* hereafter cited as *STh*.)

165 Scholastic theologians argued that monks, friars, and bishops lived *in status perfectionis*. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 2, q. 184, a. 5.

166 John Gerson, *Concerning the Spiritual Life* (*De vita spirituali animae*), lectio 2.

167 Authors of collections of cases of conscience, written to instruct confessors, often entitled *Summa summarum*.

people tried to collate the traditions and sought fairness¹⁶⁸ in order to help consciences. They were so occupied with such efforts that in the meantime they ignored all wholesome Christian teaching concerning more important matters, such as faith, comfort in spiritual trials,¹⁶⁹ and the like. Many upright and learned people before our time have also complained a lot about the fact that such traditions cause much quarreling in the church and thereby prevent devout people from coming to a right understanding of Christ. Gerson and others complained bitterly about this. In fact, Augustine also was displeased that consciences were burdened with so many traditions. That is why in this connection he gives instruction that no one should regard them as necessary.¹⁷⁰

Consequently, our people have not taught about these matters out of malice or contempt toward ecclesiastical authority. But dire need has necessitated instruction about the above-mentioned matters, which have arisen from a misunderstanding of tradition. For the gospel demands that in the church one should and must emphasize the teaching concerning faith. But this cannot be understood if people imagine that grace is earned through self-chosen works.

Concerning this the following is taught. No one can earn grace, become reconciled with God, or make satisfaction for sin by observing the aforesaid human traditions. That is why they should not be made into a necessary service of God. Reasons for this are cited from Scripture. In Matthew 15[:9*] Christ defends the apostles for not observing customary traditions, saying: “In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.” Since he calls them “vain worship” they must not be necessary. Then soon thereafter he says: “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person” [Matt. 15:11*]. Likewise, Paul says in Romans 14[:17*]: “For the

168 1580 Book of Concord: *epieikeia*. Often left untranslated, this Stoic term was used by reformers to mean equity, balance, or mitigation, especially with laws or social norms.

169 *hohe Anfechtungen*.

170 Augustine, Epistle 54 to Januarius, II.2 (CSEL 34:160, 9ff.; NPNF, ser. 1, 1:300).

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

Matthew 15:9 (NRSV)

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¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.”

Matthew 15:11 (NRSV)

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¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

kingdom of God is not food and drink,” and in Colossians 2[:16*]: “Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing . . . sabbaths.” Peter says in Acts 15[:10–11*]: “Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” Here Peter forbids the burdening of consciences with additional external ceremonies, whether from Moses or others. In 1 Timothy 4[:1–3*] such prohibitions as forbidding food, marriage, and the like are called teachings of the devil. For it is directly opposed to the gospel to institute or perform such works for the purpose of earning forgiveness of sin through them or to suppose that no one may be a Christian without such service.

[Romans 14:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths.

[Colossians 2:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

[Acts 15:10–11 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

² through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron.

³ They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

[1 Timothy 4:1–3 \(NRSV\)](#)

But the accusation that our people, like Jovinian,¹⁷³ prohibit mortification and discipline will not be found in their writings, which reveal something quite different. For concerning the holy cross they have always taught that Christians are obliged to suffer, and that this is proper and real, not contrived, mortification.

In addition, it is also taught that all are obliged to conduct themselves regarding bodily discipline, such as fasting and other work, in such a way as not to give occasion to sin, but not as if they earned grace by such works.¹⁷⁴ Such bodily discipline should not be limited only to specific days but should be maintained continually. Christ speaks about this in Luke 21[:34*]: “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation,” and [Mark 9:29*:] “This kind [of demon] can come out only through prayer and fasting.”¹⁷⁵ Paul says that he punished his body and enslaved it [1 Cor. 9:27*], indicating that mortification should not serve the purpose of earning grace but of keeping the body in a condition that does not prevent performing the duties required by one’s calling. So fasting in itself is not rejected. Instead, we

173 A Roman ascetic of the fourth century who opposed the monastic teaching about merits and the stages of ethical perfection. (In fact, he did not oppose “mortification and discipline,” as Jerome had contended in slanderous writings against him.)

174 See, for example, Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian* (1520) (WA 7:59, 24–60, 29; LW 31:358–59). The original text is in the singular. For the word “grace” the 1531 *editio princeps* reads “forgiveness of sins or would be thereby pronounced righteous before God.”

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³⁴ “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly,

[Luke 21:34 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁹ He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

[Mark 9:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

175 Cited here according to the alternative reading in the NRSV, which corresponds to the German and Latin texts.

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²⁷ but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

[1 Corinthians 9:27 \(NRSV\)](#)

reject making it a required service with prescribed days and foods, for this confuses the consciences.

Our side also retains many ceremonies and traditions, such as the order of the Mass and other singing, festivals, and the like, which serve to preserve order in the church. At the same time, however, the people are taught that such external worship of God does not make them righteous before God and that it is to be observed without burdening consciences, that is, no one sins by omitting it without causing offense. The ancient Fathers also maintained such liberty with respect to external ceremonies. For in the East the festival of Easter was celebrated at a date different from that in Rome.¹⁷⁸ When some wanted to divide the church over this difference, others admonished them that there was no need to have uniformity in such customs. As Irenaeus says: “Diversity in fasting does not dissolve unity in faith.”¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, concerning such diversity in human ordinances, dist. 12 also states that they are not in conflict with the unity of Christendom.¹⁸⁰ The *Tripartite History*, Book 9, gathers many examples of diverse church customs and establishes a useful Christian saying: “It was not the intention of the apostles to institute festivals but to teach faith and love.”¹⁸¹

[XXVII.] Concerning Monastic Vows

In speaking of monastic vows, it is necessary, first of all, to consider how they were viewed earlier, what kind of life there was in the monasteries, and how much happened in them daily that was contrary not only to God’s Word but also to papal canons. For at the time of St. Augustine monastic vocations were voluntary. Later, when proper discipline and teaching became corrupted, monastic vows were contrived. With them, as in a prison of their own devising, people wanted to restore discipline.¹⁸²

In addition to monastic vows many other things were introduced, and a great number of bonds and burdens were laid on many even before they had attained an appropriate age.¹⁸⁴

178 In Asia Minor, Easter was observed on the day of the Jewish Passover (Nisan 14), the day of the full moon after the spring equinox. In the West, as in Palestine and Egypt, it was observed on the Sunday following.

179 In Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* V, 24, 13 (MPG 20:493–98; NPNF, ser. 2, 1:243).

180 Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 12, chap. 10.

181 Cassiodorus, *Tripartite Ecclesiastical History* IX, 38, quoting from Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* V, 22 (MPG 67:628; NPNF, ser. 2, 2:130).

182 Until the Benedictine rule gained ascendancy in the West in about the eighth century, there were a variety of monastic rules. Withdrawal from monastic life was originally allowable.

184 The dedication of children to monastic life by their parents was common in the Middle Ages and allowed by canon law.

Many persons also entered monastic life in ignorance. Although they were not too young, they nevertheless did not sufficiently estimate and understand their capabilities. All of those who were entangled and ensnared in this way were forced and compelled to remain in such bondage, in spite of the fact that even papal canons would have set many of them free.¹⁸⁵ It was more difficult in nunneries than in monasteries, even though it would have been seemly to spare the women as the weaker gender. Such rigor and severity also displeased many devout people in former times. For they certainly noticed that both boys and girls had been stuck away in monasteries for the sake of keeping them alive. They certainly also noticed how badly this arrangement turned out and what offense and burdening of consciences it caused. Many people complained that the canons were not respected at all. In addition, monastic vows have such a reputation that even many monks with little understanding were clearly displeased.

It was pretended that monastic vows would be equal to baptism, and that through monastic life one could earn forgiveness of sin and justification before God.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, they added that one earns through monastic life not only righteousness and innocence, but also that through it one keeps the commands and counsels written in the gospel.¹⁸⁷ In this way monastic vows were praised more highly than baptism. It was also said that one could obtain more merit through the monastic life than through all other walks of life, which had been ordered by God, such as the office of pastor or preacher, the office of ruler, prince, lord, and the like. (These all serve in their vocations according to God's command, Word, and mandate without any contrived spiritual status.) None of these things can be denied, for one can find them in their own books.

Furthermore, whoever was so ensnared and ended up in the monastery learned little about Christ. At one time there were schools of Holy Scripture and other disciplines useful for the Christian church in the monasteries, so that pastors and bishops were taken from the monasteries. But now the picture is quite different. In former times, people adopted the monastic life in order to study Scripture. Now they pretend that the monastic life is of such a nature that through it a person may earn God's grace and righteousness before God—indeed that it is a state of perfection, far above all other walks of life instituted by God.¹⁸⁸ All this is mentioned, without

185 See above, n. 142.

186 The comparison of monastic profession and baptism was common in the Middle Ages. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 2, q. 189, a. 3 ad 3. "It may reasonably be said that through entering a religious order a person attains remission of all sins . . . wherefore it is read in the *Lives of the Fathers* that those entering a religious order attained the same grace as the baptized."

187 Medieval theologians, following a development that can be traced back to Tertullian, distinguished between "precepts of the gospel," which must be observed for salvation, and "counsels of the gospel," which are not obligatory but enable one to attain salvation "better and more quickly." See, for example, Bonaventure, *Brief Speech (Breviloquium)* V, 9. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 108, a. 4, states: "This is the difference between a counsel and a precept, that a precept implies necessity, but a counsel is left up to the choice of the one to whom it is given."

188 For example, Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 2, q. 186, a. 1. The words *Stand* and *Stände* are translated "state" and "walks of life," respectively.

any disrespect intended, in order that everyone may better grasp and understand what and how our people teach and preach.

In the first place, it is taught among us concerning those who are inclined to marry, that all those who are not suited for celibacy have the power, authority, and right to marry. For vows cannot annul God's order and command. Now God's command reads (1 Cor. 7[:2*]): "But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband." Not only God's command urges, compels, and insists upon this, but also God's creation and order direct all to the state of marriage who are not blessed with the gift of virginity by a special work of God, according to God's own Word (Gen. 2[:18*]): "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

What objections can be raised against this? People may praise the vow and obligation as highly as they want, but they still cannot force the abrogation of God's command. The teachers say that vows made contrary to papal law are not even binding.¹⁸⁹ How much less should they be binding or have legal standing when they are contrary to God's command!

If there were no reasons for allowing the annulment of the binding vows, popes would also not have given dispensation and release from them. For no human being has the right to break an obligation derived from divine laws. That is why the popes were well aware that some balance should be used in regard to this obligation and have often given dispensation, as in the case of the king of Aragon¹⁹⁰ and many others. If, then, dispensations were granted for the maintenance of temporal interests, how much more fairly should dispensations be granted for the sake of the souls' needs.

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² But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

[1 Corinthians 7:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

[Genesis 2:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

189 Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 20, q. 4, c. 2, states that a vow made by a monk without the consent of his abbot is without effect.

190 Ramiro II, a monk, was released from his vows after the death of his childless brother so that he might assume the throne. The story is told by John Gerson, *Concerning the Counsels of the Gospel and the State of Perfection (De consiliis evangelicis et statu perfectionis)*, in his *Opera* II, 678c.

Next, why do our opponents insist so strongly that vows must be kept without first ascertaining whether a vow has integrity? For in matters within human power a vow should not be forced but voluntary.¹⁹¹ However, it is well known to what degree perpetual chastity lies within human power and ability. Moreover, there are few—men or women—who have taken monastic vows on their own, willingly and after due consideration. They were talked into taking monastic vows before they understood what was involved. At times, they were also forced and driven to do so. Accordingly, it is not right to argue so rashly and insistently about the obligation of vows, in view of the fact that everyone confesses it is against the nature and integrity of a vow to be taken by force, but rather it should be taken with good counsel and due consideration.

Some canons and papal laws annul vows made under the age of fifteen years.¹⁹³ For they take into consideration that before this age a person does not have sufficient understanding to decide how possibly to determine or arrange an entire life. Another canon concedes still more years to human frailty, for it forbids taking monastic vows before the eighteenth year.¹⁹⁴ This provides an excuse and reason for a great many to leave the monasteries. For a majority entered the monastery in childhood before attaining such age.

Finally, even if the breaking of monastic vows might be censured, it could not be concluded from this that the marriage of those who broke them should be dissolved. For St. Augustine, cited in *Marriage Matters* (q. 27, chap. 1),¹⁹⁵ says that such a marriage should not be dissolved. Now St. Augustine certainly does not have a low reputation in the Christian church, even though some have subsequently differed from him.

Although God's command concerning marriage frees and releases many from monastic vows, our people offer still more reasons why monastic vows are null and void. For all service of God instituted and chosen by human beings without God's command and authority to obtain righteousness and God's grace is contrary to God, the holy gospel, and God's decree, as Christ himself says (Matt. 15[:9*]): "In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines." St. Paul also teaches everywhere that righteousness is not to be sought in our precepts

191 See Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 2, q. 88, a. 8. "A vow is a promise made to God. However, no one can obligate himself or herself for something in the power of another, but only for what is in his or her own power."

193 Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 20, q. 1, c. 10.

194 Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 5.

195 *Nuptiarum*. Augustine, *Concerning the Goodness of Widowhood* (*De bono viduitatis*), chap. IX.12 (*CSEL* 41:317–18; *NPNF*, ser. 1, 3:445f.), cited in Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 27, q. 1, c. 41.

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

and services of God contrived by human beings, but that righteousness and innocence before God come from faith and trust, when we believe that God receives us in grace for the sake of Christ, his only Son.

Now it is quite evident the monks have taught and preached that their contrived spiritual status makes satisfaction for sin and obtains God's grace and righteousness.¹⁹⁶ What is this but to diminish the glory and praise of the grace of Christ and to deny the righteousness of faith? It follows from this that the customary vows have been improper and false services of God. That is why they are also not binding. For a godless vow, made contrary to God's command, is null and void, just as the canons also teach that an oath should not bind a person to sin.¹⁹⁷

St. Paul says in Galatians 5[:4*]: "You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." Therefore, those who want to be justified by vows are also cut off from Christ and fall away from the grace of God. For they rob Christ, who alone justifies, of his honor and give such honor to their vows and monastic life.

No one can deny that the monks also taught and preached that they become righteous and earn forgiveness of sins through their vows and monastic life. In fact, they have contrived an even more useless and absurd claim, saying that they imparted their good works to others. Now if someone wanted to take all this to an extreme and bring accusation against them, how many items could be assembled that the monks themselves are now ashamed of and wish had never occurred! Besides all this, they persuaded the people that these humanly contrived spiritual orders were states of Christian perfection.¹⁹⁸ Surely this means to praise works as the means of becoming righteous. Now it is no small offense in the Christian church to present to the people a service of God, which human beings have contrived without God's command, teaching that such service of God makes people innocent and righteous before God. For righteousness of faith, which ought to be emphasized most, is obscured when people are bedazzled with this strange angelic spirituality and false pretense of poverty, humility, and chastity.¹⁹⁹

196 See Thomas Aquinas, as cited above, n. 187.

197 Gratian, *Decretum* II, chap. 22, q. 4, c. 22.

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⁴ You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

[Galatians 5:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

198 Cited above, n. 188.

199 By the later Middle Ages the monastic vow was centered on three things: poverty, chastity, and obedience. See Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 2, q. 186, a. 7. "The religious state . . . comprises three vows of obedience, continence, and poverty, in which vows religious perfection consists."

In addition, the commands of God and proper, true service of God are obscured when people hear that only monks must be in the state of perfection. For Christian perfection is to fear God earnestly with the whole heart and yet also to have a sincere confidence, faith, and trust that we have a gracious, merciful God because of Christ; that we may and should pray for and request from God whatever we need and confidently expect help from him in all affliction, according to each person's vocation and walk of life; and that meanwhile we should diligently do external good works and attend to our calling. This is true perfection and true service of God—not being a mendicant or wearing a black or gray cowl, etc. However, the common people form many harmful opinions from false praise of the monastic life, such as when they hear the state of celibacy praised above all measure. For it follows that their consciences are troubled because they are married. When the common people hear that only mendicants may be perfect, they cannot know that they may keep possessions and transact business without sin. When the people hear that it is only a “counsel” [of the gospel] not to take revenge, some will conclude that it is not sinful to take revenge outside their office. Still others think that revenge is not right for Christians at all, even on the part of political authority.²⁰⁰

Many examples are recorded of people leaving wife and child—even their civil office—and putting themselves into a monastery. This, they said, is fleeing from the world and seeking a life that is more pleasing to God than the other life. They were unable to realize that one should serve God by observing the commandments he has given and not through the commandments contrived by human beings. Now the life supported by God's command is certainly a good and perfect state, but the life not supported by God's command is a dangerous state. It has been necessary to keep people well informed about such matters.

In former times, Gerson also rebuked the errors of the monks about perfection. He showed that it was an innovation in his day to speak of monastic life as a state of perfection.²⁰¹

There are so many ungodly notions and errors attached to monastic vows: that they justify and make righteous before God; that they must be Christian perfection; that through them a person may keep both the counsels of the gospel and the commandments; that they contain works of supererogation, beyond what is owed to God.²⁰² Since, then, all of this is false, useless, and humanly contrived, monastic vows are null and void.²⁰³

200 A veiled reference to the teaching of some Anabaptists and others not allied with the reformers. For par. 54–55 see CA XXVII.12 and n. 188.

201 See John Gerson, *Concerning the Counsels of the Gospel and the State of Perfection* (*De consiliis evangelicis et statu perfectionis*), in his *Opera*, II, 680.

202 Works in addition to those that every Christian is obliged to perform, such as the “counsels of the gospel,” which earned a higher degree of merit.

203 The 1531 *editio princeps* contains some variations of the text of this article without, however, varying in substance. See the variations in BSLK 110–13.

*[XXVIII.] Concerning the Power of Bishops*²⁰⁴

Many and various things have been written in former times concerning the power of bishops. Some have improperly mixed the power of bishops with the secular sword, and such careless mixture has caused many extensive wars, uprisings, and rebellions. For the bishops, under the guise of power given to them by Christ, have not only introduced new forms of worship²⁰⁵ and burdened consciences with reserved cases²⁰⁶ and with forcible use of the ban, but they also took it upon themselves to set up and depose emperors and kings according to their pleasure. Such outrage has long since been condemned by learned and devout people in Christendom. That is why our people have been compelled, for the sake of comforting consciences, to indicate the difference between spiritual and secular power, sword, and authority. They have taught that, for the sake of God's command, everyone should honor and esteem with all reverence both authorities and powers as the two highest gifts of God on earth.

Our people teach as follows. According to the gospel the power of the keys²⁰⁷ or of the bishops is a power and command of God to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sin, and to administer and distribute the sacraments. For Christ sent out the apostles with this command (John 20[:21–23*]): “As the Father has sent me, so I send you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

The same power of the keys or of the bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching God's Word and by administering the sacraments to many persons or to individuals, depending on one's calling. Not bodily but eternal things and benefits are given in this way, such as eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These benefits cannot be obtained except through the office of preaching and through the administration of the holy sacraments. For St. Paul says [Rom. 1:16*]: “The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who

204 Based on an earlier draft entitled “Concerning the Power of the Keys.” See the text in *BSLK* 120–24.

205 *Gottesdienst*, literally, service of God. See above CA XXVI and XXVII.

206 Cases in which absolution was reserved for bishops or the pope.

207 The original title of this article. See the Torgau Articles.

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

²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

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

[John 20:21–23 \(NRSV\)](#)

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has faith.” Now inasmuch as the power of the church or of the bishops bestows eternal benefits and is used and exercised only through the office of preaching, it does not interfere at all with public order and secular authority. For secular authority deals with matters altogether different from the gospel. Secular power does not protect the soul but, using the sword and physical penalties, it protects the body and goods against external violence.²⁰⁸

That is why one should not mix or confuse the two authorities, the spiritual and the secular. For spiritual power has its command to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. It should not invade an alien office. It should not set up and depose kings. It should not annul or disrupt secular law and obedience to political authority. It should not make or prescribe laws for the secular power concerning secular affairs. For Christ himself said [John 18:36*]: “My kingdom is not from this world.” And again [Luke 12:14*]: “Who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” And St. Paul in Philippians 3[:20*]: “Our citizenship is in heaven.” And in 2 Corinthians 10[:4–5*]: “For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[Romans 1:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

208 *Gewalt*, otherwise translated “power.”

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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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¹⁴ But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?”

[Luke 12:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Philippians 3:20 \(NRSV\)](#)

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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

divine power to destroy strongholds . . . arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God.”

In this way our people distinguish the offices of the two authorities and powers and direct that both be honored as the highest gifts of God on earth.

However, where bishops possess secular authority and the sword, they possess them not as bishops by divine right but by human, imperial right, given by Roman emperors and kings for the secular administration of their lands. That has nothing at all to do with the office of the gospel.

Consequently, according to divine right it is the office of the bishop to preach the gospel, to forgive sin, to judge doctrine and reject doctrine that is contrary to the gospel, and to exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose ungodly life is manifest—not with human power but with God’s Word alone. That is why parishioners and churches owe obedience to bishops, according to this saying of Christ (Luke 10[:16*]): “Whoever listens to you listens to me.” But whenever they teach, institute, or introduce something contrary to the gospel, we have God’s command in such a case not to be obedient (Matt. 7[:15*]): “Beware of false prophets.” And St. Paul in Galatians 1[: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!” And in 2 Corinthians 13[:8*]: “For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.” And

⁵ and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.

[2 Corinthians 10:4–5 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁶ “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

[Luke 10:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

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

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

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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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again [2 Cor. 13:10*]: “. . . using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.” Canon law also commands the same in Part II, Question 7, in the chapters entitled “Priests” and “Sheep.”²⁰⁹ And St. Augustine writes in the letter against Petilian that one should not obey bishops, even if they have been regularly elected, when they err or teach and command something contrary to the holy, divine Scripture.²¹⁰

Whatever other power and jurisdiction bishops have in various matters, such as marriage or tithes,²¹¹ they have them by virtue of human right. However, when bishops neglect such duties, the princes are obligated—whether they like it or not—to administer justice to their subjects for the sake of peace, in order to prevent discord and great unrest in their lands.

Furthermore, it is also debated whether bishops have the power to establish ceremonies in the church as well as regulations concerning food, festivals, and the different orders of the clergy. For those who grant bishops this power cite this saying of Christ (John 16[:12–13*]): “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he

⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

[2 Corinthians 13:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁰ So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

[2 Corinthians 13:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

²⁰⁹ *Sacerdotes and Oves*. Gratian, *Decretum* II, q. 7, c. 8, 13. Compare Luther, *That a Christian Assembly . . . Has the Right . . . to Judge All Teaching . . .* (1523) (WA 11:408–16; LW 39:301–14).

²¹⁰ Augustine, *Concerning the Unity of the Church (De unitate ecclesiae)* 11, 28 (MPL 43:410f.; CSEL 52:264). This is his second response to Petilian.

²¹¹ The payment of one-tenth of the gross income from all lands and industries to the church. Such obligation was also part of Mosaic and Roman law, and it first became an obligation to the church in Ireland in the sixth century.

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¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

[John 16:12–13 \(NRSV\)](#)

will guide you into all the truth.” They also cite the example in Acts 15[:20*, 29*],²¹² where the eating of blood and what is strangled was prohibited. They appeal as well to the transference of the sabbath to Sunday—contrary to the Ten Commandments, as they view it. No other example is so strongly emphasized and quoted as the transference of the sabbath. Thereby they want to maintain that the power of the church is great, because it has dispensed with and altered part of the Ten Commandments.²¹³

Concerning this question, our people teach that bishops do not have the power to institute or establish something contrary to the gospel, as is indicated above and as is taught by canon law throughout the ninth distinction.²¹⁴ Now it is patently contrary to God’s command and Word to make laws out of opinions or to require that by observing them a person makes satisfaction for sin and obtains grace. For the honor of Christ’s merit is slandered when we take it upon ourselves to earn grace through such ordinances. It is also obvious that, because of this notion, human ordinances have multiplied beyond calculation while the teaching concerning faith and the righteousness of faith have been almost completely suppressed. Daily new festivals and new fasts have been commanded; new ceremonies and new veneration of the saints have been instituted in order that by such works grace and everything good might be earned from God.

Moreover, those who institute human ordinances also act contrary to God’s command when they attach sin to food, days, and similar things and burden Christendom with bondage to the law, as if in order to earn God’s grace there had to be such service of God among Christians like the Levitical service,²¹⁵ which God supposedly commanded the apostles and bishops to establish,

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²⁰ but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.

[Acts 15:20 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

[Acts 15:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

212 These passages were cited by John Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces (Enchiridion Locorum Communiorum)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), chap. 1 (pp. 9, 13, 14), chap. 2 (p. 19), and chap. 4 (p. 46).

213 Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 2, q. 122, a. 4 ad 4. “The observation of the Lord’s Day [Sunday] in the new law succeeded the observation of the sabbath, not from the power of a prescribed law, but from the power of the church’s constitution and the custom of the Christian people.”

214 Gratian, *Decretum* I, dist. 9, chaps. 8ff.

215 A reference to Old Testament prescriptions, for example in the Book of Leviticus.

as some have written. It is quite believable that some bishops have been deceived by the example of the Law of Moses. This is how countless ordinances came into being: for example, that it is supposed to be a mortal sin to do manual labor on festivals, even when it offends no one else; that it is a mortal sin to omit the seven hours;²¹⁶ that some foods defile the conscience; that fasting is a work that appeases God; that in a reserved case sin is not forgiven unless one first asks to be forgiven by the person for whom the case is reserved—despite the fact that canon laws do not speak of the reservation of guilt but only of the reservation of church penalties.²¹⁷

Where, then, did the bishops get the right and power to impose such ordinances on Christendom and to ensnare consciences? For in Acts 15[:10*] St. Peter prohibits placing the yoke on the necks of the disciples. And St. Paul tells the Corinthians [2 Cor. 10:8*] that they have been given authority for building up and not for tearing down. Why then do they increase sin with such ordinances?

Indeed, clear sayings of divine Scripture prohibit the establishment of such ordinances for the purpose of earning God's grace or as if they were necessary for salvation. St. Paul says in Colossians 2[:16–17*]: "Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come,

216 The canonical hours, or seven daily hours of prayer, prescribed for members of religious orders and often observed by other Christians.

217 See above, n. 206.

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¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

[Acts 15:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁸ Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it.

[2 Corinthians 10:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths.

¹⁷ These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

[Colossians 2:16–17 \(NRSV\)](#)

but the substance belongs to Christ.” Again [Col. 2:20–23*]: “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, ‘Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch?’ All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom. . . .” Again, in Titus 1[:14*] St. Paul clearly prohibits paying attention to Jewish myths or human commandments, which obstruct the truth.

In Matthew 15[:14*] Christ himself also speaks of those who drive the people to human commandments: “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.” And he rejects such service of God, saying [Matt. 15:13*]: “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.”

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²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations,

²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”?

²² All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings.

²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.

[Colossians 2:20–23 \(NRSV\)](#)

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

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

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¹⁴ Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.”

[Matthew 15:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹³ He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.

[Matthew 15:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

If, then, bishops have the power to burden the churches with innumerable ordinances and to ensnare consciences, why does divine Scripture so frequently prohibit the making and keeping of human ordinances? Why does it call them teachings of the devil? Could the Holy Spirit possibly have warned against all this in vain?

Inasmuch as it is contrary to the gospel to establish such regulations as necessary to appease God and earn grace, it is not at all proper for the bishops to compel observation of such services of God. For in Christendom the teaching of Christian freedom must be preserved, namely, that bondage to the law is not necessary for justification, as Paul writes in Galatians 5[:1*]: “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.” For the chief article of the gospel must be maintained, that we obtain the grace of God through faith in Christ without our merit and do not earn it through service of God instituted by human beings.

How, then, should Sunday and other similar church ordinances and ceremonies be regarded? Our people reply²¹⁸ that bishops or pastors may make regulations for the sake of good order in the church, but not thereby to obtain God’s grace, to make satisfaction for sin, or to bind consciences, nor to regard such as a service of God or to consider it a sin when these rules are broken without giving offense. So St. Paul prescribed in Corinthians that women should cover their heads in the assembly [1 Cor. 11:5*], and that preachers in the assembly should not all speak at once, but in order, one after the other [1 Cor. 14:30–33*].

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¹ For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

[Galatians 5:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

218 A reply was called for since John Eck had attacked the Lutherans for erroneous views of the Lord’s Day in his *404 Theses*, nos. 177–79.

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⁵ but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head— it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved.

[1 Corinthians 11:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

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³⁰ If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent.

³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.

³² And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets,

Such regulation belongs rightfully in the Christian assembly for the sake of love and peace, to be obedient to bishops and pastors in such cases, and to keep such order to the extent that no one offends another—so that there may not be disorder or unruly conduct in the church. However, consciences should not be burdened by holding that such things are necessary for salvation or by considering it a sin when they are violated without giving offense to others; just as no one would say that a woman commits a sin if, without offending people, she leaves the house with her head uncovered.

The same applies to the regulation of Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, or similar festivals and customs. For those who think that the sabbath had to be replaced by Sunday are very much mistaken. For Holy Scripture did away with the sabbath, and it teaches that after the revelation of the gospel all ceremonies of the old law may be given up. Nevertheless, the Christian church instituted Sunday because it became necessary to set apart a specific day so that the people might know when to assemble; and the church was all the more pleased and inclined to do this so that the people might have an example of Christian freedom and so that everyone would know that neither the keeping of the sabbath nor any other day is necessary.

There are many faulty debates about the transformation of the law, the ceremonies of the New Testament, and the change of the sabbath.²¹⁹

They have all arisen from the false and erroneous opinion that in Christianity one would have to have services of God that correspond to the Levitical or Jewish ones, and that Christ commanded the apostles and the bishops to invent new ceremonies that were necessary for salvation. Christianity has been permeated with these kinds of errors because the righteousness of faith was not taught or preached with purity and sincerity. Some argue that although Sunday cannot be kept on the basis of divine law, it must be kept almost as if it were divine law; and they prescribe the kind and amount of work that may be done on the day of rest. But what else are such debates except snares of conscience? For although they presume to moderate and mitigate²²⁰ human ordinances, there certainly cannot be any mitigation and moderation as long as the opinion remains and prevails that they are necessary. Now this opinion will persist as long as no one knows anything about the righteousness of faith and Christian freedom.

The apostles directed that one should abstain from blood and from what is strangled. But who observes this now? Yet those who do not observe it commit no sin. For the apostles themselves did not want to burden consciences with such bondage, but prohibited such eating for a time to

³³ for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.(As in all the churches of the saints,

1 Corinthians 14:30–33 (NRSV)

219 For example, Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 103, considers such questions as whether the ceremonies of the law antedated the law, whether they ceased when Christ came, and whether it is a mortal sin to observe them subsequent to Christ's coming.

220 *Episkeiziern*, a German verb, from the Greek noun *epieikeia*, meaning "equity." Aristotle used the term to describe the sensible fulfillment of a law. See above, CA XXVI.14, n. 168.

avoid offense. For in this ordinance one must pay attention to the chief part of Christian doctrine which is not abolished by this decree.²²¹

Hardly any of the ancient canons are observed according to the letter. Many of their rules fall daily into complete disuse, even among those who observe such ordinances most diligently. Consciences can neither be counseled nor helped unless we keep this moderation in mind: that such ordinances are not to be considered necessary, and even disregarding them does no harm to consciences.

Bishops could easily foster obedience if they did not insist on the observance of ordinances that cannot be observed without sin. However, now they engage in prohibiting both kinds of the holy sacrament or prohibiting marriage for the clergy; they admit no one to the ministry who refuses to swear an oath not to preach this doctrine, even though it is undoubtedly in accord with the holy gospel. Our churches do not desire that the bishops restore peace and unity at the expense of their honor and dignity (even though it is incumbent on the bishops to do this, too, in an emergency). They ask only that the bishops relax certain unreasonable burdens which did not exist in the church in former times and which were adopted contrary to the custom of the universal Christian church. Perhaps there were some reasons for introducing them, but they are not in tune with our times. Nor can it be denied that some ordinances were adopted without being understood. Accordingly, the bishops should be so gracious as to temper these ordinances, since such change does not harm the unity of the Christian church. For many ordinances devised by human beings have fallen into disuse with the passing of time and need not be observed, as papal law itself testifies.²²³ If, however, this is impossible and permission cannot be obtained from them to moderate and abrogate such human ordinances as cannot be observed without sin, then we must follow the apostolic rule which commands us to obey God rather than any human beings [Acts 5:29*].

St. Peter prohibits the bishops to rule as if they had the power to force the churches to do whatever they desired [1 Peter 5:2*]. Now the question is not how to take power away from the

221 The so-called apostolic decree in Acts 15:23–29*.

223 For example, the penitential rules of the ancient church were supplanted in the early Middle Ages when the sacrament of penance was developed.

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

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

*

² to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it— not for sordid gain but eagerly.

[1 Peter 5:2](#) (NRSV)

bishops. Instead, we desire and ask that they would not force consciences into sin. But if they will not do so and despise this request, let them consider how they will have to answer to God, since by their obstinacy they cause division and schism, which they should rightly help to prevent.²²⁴

[Conclusion]²²⁵

These are the chief articles that are regarded as controversial. For although many more abuses and errors could have been added, we listed only the principal ones in order to avoid prolixity and undue length. The others can easily be assessed in the light of these. In the past, there were many complaints about indulgences, pilgrimages, and the misuse of the ban. Moreover, pastors had endless quarrels with monks about hearing confession, funerals, sermons on special occasions, and countless other matters. All this we have passed over, being as considerate as we could, so that the chief points at issue may be better discerned. Moreover, it must not be thought that anything has been said or introduced out of hatred or effrontery. On the contrary, we have listed only matters that we thought needed to be brought up and reported on. We did this in order to make it quite clear that among us nothing in doctrine or ceremonies has been accepted that would contradict either Holy Scripture or the universal Christian church. For it is manifest and obvious that we have very diligently and with God's help (to speak without boasting) prevented any new and godless teaching from insinuating itself into our churches, spreading, and finally gaining the upper hand.

In keeping with the summons,²²⁶ we have desired to present the above articles as a declaration of our confession and the teaching of our people. Anyone who should find it defective shall willingly be furnished with an additional account based on divine Holy Scripture.

224 Of the variants in the text of the 1531 *editio princeps*, listed in BSLK 133, n. 1, these are most important. For par. 50–52: “For in the church this chief article of the gospel must be kept pure and clear: that we do not earn forgiveness of sins through our work and that we are not pronounced righteous on account of our self-chosen service of God, but instead for the sake of Christ through faith. Furthermore, the following teaching must be known and kept: that no such service of God, as is found in the Law of Moses, with its appointed foods and clothing and the like, is necessary in the New Testament and that no one should burden the church and create sins out of such things. For Paul says in Galatians 5[:1*]: ‘Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.’ ” For par. 60: “They ordered Sunday so that the Word of God could be heard and learned. In the same way the festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, were set up to teach the marvelous story of salvation. Thus, having a fixed time is helpful, so that people remember such things more firmly. It is not our opinion that such celebration must be held in a Jewish way, as if there were a necessary worship in the New Testament, but rather that it should be held because of the teaching.”

225 Based on an earlier draft by Philip Melanchthon. A slightly different ending is found in the 1531 *editio princeps*. See the texts in BSLK 135–36.

Your Imperial Majesty's most humble, obedient [servants]

JOHN, duke of Saxony, elector

GEORGE, margrave of Brandenburg[-Ansbach]

ERNEST, duke of Lüneburg

PHILIP, landgrave of Hesse

JOHN FREDERICK, duke of Saxony

FRANCIS, duke of Lüneburg

WOLFGANG, prince of Anhalt

The Mayor and Council of Nuremberg

The Mayor and Council of Reutlingen²²⁷

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226 See above, CA, "Preface," 1.

227 For information concerning these rulers, see the biographical index. Some manuscripts mistakenly include Albert, count of Mansfeld, but he did not have official standing at the imperial diet. In July 1530 the imperial cities of Windsheim, Heilbronn, Kempten, and Weissenburg (im Nordgau) also subscribed.

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