



**San Marcos
Lutheran Church
San Marcos, CA**



**Our Lutheran Roots —
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 Melancthon, 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 Melancthon, 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, Melancthon 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, Melancthon, 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. Melancthon 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 Melancthon'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, Melancthon 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, Melancthon 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. 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 Gene-

van influence. Thus, those who opposed this position insisted on the “Confessio Augustana Invariata,” the original text of the 1531 *editio princeps*.

The Augsburg Confession

Latin Text

The Confession of Faith Presented
to the Invincible Emperor, Charles V, Caesar Augustus,
in the City of Augsburg in the Year 1530.

PSALM 119[:46*]:

*“I will also speak of your decrees before kings, and shall not be put to shame.”*⁸

Preface

Most invincible Emperor, Caesar Augustus, most gracious Lord. Your Imperial Majesty summoned an imperial diet in Augsburg, first to deliberate concerning aid against the Turk—that most dreadful, hereditary, and ancient enemy of the Christian name and religion—how its fury may be resisted with continuing and concerted preparations for war, and second to deliberate concerning the dissensions regarding our holy religion and Christian faith, so that in this issue of religion the opinions and positions of the parties among us would be heard, understood, and considered, charitably, amicably, and with mutual graciousness. In this way, by correcting whatever has been treated differently in the writings of both parties, everything could be brought together and returned to one single truth and to Christian concord. Moreover, we may thus honor and serve one, pure, and true religion. For just as we exist and fight⁹ under one Christ, so we may also be able to live in one Christian church in unity and concord. Inasmuch as we, the undersigned, as well as the other electors, princes, and estates, have been summoned to the aforementioned assembly, we have obediently complied with the mandate of the emperor and have come to Augsburg. Indeed, we can say without boasting that we were among the first to arrive.

However, when at the beginning of this assembly in Augsburg Your Imperial Majesty made, among other things, a request to the electors, princes, and other imperial estates, that each of the estates of the empire should set forth and present its opinion and judgment in German and Latin, pursuant to the imperial edict, we, after due deliberation, responded in turn on last Wednesday to Your Imperial Majesty that we, on our part, would submit the articles of our confession on the next Friday. Accordingly, in compliance with the wish of Your Imperial Majesty, we submit in this case¹⁵ concerning religion our preachers’ and our own confession of the manner in which up until now they have taught this doctrine among us based on the Holy Scriptures and the pure Word of God.

If now the other electors, princes, and estates of the empire similarly produce their opinions in the case concerning religion, according to the aforesaid proposal of Your Majesty, with statements in Latin and German, we submit that we are prepared, in dutiful obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, as our most gracious Lord, to discuss in a friendly way suitable and accepta-

ble approaches with the aforementioned princes, our friends, and with the estates so that, insofar as this may honorably be done, we may agree, and—with the matter between our parties being discussed peacefully and without hateful contention, using the written proposals from both sides—the dissension, God grant, may be stopped and one, true, harmonious religion be restored. For we all ought to exist and fight under one Christ and confess one Christ, according to Your Imperial Majesty's edict, so all things may be led to the truth of God. We, therefore, offer to God our most ardent prayer that he may help in this matter and grant peace.

However, if this way of handling the case according to the procedure of Your Imperial Majesty's edict were not to proceed—which pertains to the other electors, princes, and estates, as the other side—and if it were to bear no fruit, we indeed give testimony that we are not neglecting anything that can in any way serve the cause of reconciled Christian harmony, insofar as it can be done with God and a good conscience. Your Imperial Majesty, along with the other electors and estates of the empire and all who hold fast to the true religion with love and devotion and will have heard this case with an open mind, will graciously deign to know and understand these things from this confession of ours and our people.

Your Imperial Majesty also graciously indicated, not once but often, to the electors, princes, and estates of the empire and in a public instruction issued and read aloud at the Diet of Speyer held in the year of our Lord 1526, that, for certain reasons there stated, Your Imperial Majesty was not disposed to render a decision in the matter pertaining to religion but wanted to work with the Roman pontiff to have a council called. This was set forth even more broadly a year ago at the last Diet of Speyer. There, among other things, Your Imperial Majesty—through Lord Ferdinand, king of Bohemia and Hungary, our friend and gracious Lord, then through the orator and the imperial commissioners—caused these things to be set forth in an instruction: that Your Imperial Majesty had understood and considered the deliberation of those who had gathered in Regensburg—namely, the viceroy of Your Imperial Majesty in the empire, the president and councilors of the imperial government, and the ambassadors of the other estates—concerning the calling of a general council, and that Your Imperial Majesty judged it useful to call a council, and that, because the matters which had recently been played out between Your Imperial Majesty and the Roman pontiff were nearing peace and Christian reconciliation, Your Imperial Majesty did not doubt that the Roman pontiff could be persuaded to hold a general council. For all these reasons Your Imperial Majesty graciously indicated that he would work so that the Roman pontiff would consent to call such a council, which in the first instance must be publicized by sending out [official] letters.

Consequently, if this is the case, and if the dissensions between us and the other side have not been amicably settled, we offer, in full obedience to Your Majesty, even beyond what is required, to prepare for such a Christian, free, general council and to plead for it, as was done through electors, princes, and the estates of the empire in all imperial diets held during Your Imperial Majesty's reign, always with the most serious deliberations and great unanimity. In this most serious case we also have already earlier appealed to such a council and to Your Imperial Majesty—properly and in legal form. We still adhere to this appeal, and we neither intend nor are able to abandon this appeal throughout this or other negotiations, unless our case

will have been heard amicably and in accord with the imperial summons and will have brought about Christian concord. This is what we hereby also publicly declare.²⁵

Chief Articles of Faith

[I. Concerning God]

The churches among us teach with complete unanimity that the decree of the Council of Nicea concerning the unity of the divine essence and concerning the three persons is true and is to be believed without any doubt. That is to say, there is one divine essence which is called God and is God: eternal, incorporeal, indivisible, of immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness, the creator and preserver of all things, visible and invisible. Yet, there are three persons, coeternal and of the same essence and power: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And the term “person” is used for that meaning which the church’s authors used in this case: to signify not a part or a quality in another but that which subsists in itself.

They condemn³⁶ all heresies that have arisen against this article, such as that of the Manichaeans, who posited two principles, one good and the other evil; likewise, those of the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all others like them. They also condemn the Samosatensians, old and new, who contend that there is only one person and cleverly and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but that “Word” signifies a spoken word and “Spirit” a created movement in things.

[II. Concerning Original Sin]

Likewise, they teach that since the fall of Adam all human beings who are propagated according to nature are born with sin, that is, without fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence. And they teach that this disease or original fault⁴³ is truly sin, which even now damns and brings eternal death to those who are not born again through baptism and the Holy Spirit.

They condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that the original fault is sin and who, in order to diminish the glory of Christ’s merits and benefits, argue that human beings can be justified before God by their own powers of reason.⁴⁴

[III. Concerning the Son of God]

Likewise, they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took upon himself human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary so that there might be two natures, divine and human, inseparably conjoined in the unity of one person, one Christ, truly God and truly a human, being “born of the Virgin Mary,” who truly “suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried” that he might reconcile the Father to us and be a sacrifice not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of human beings. He also “descended into hell, and on the third day he was” truly “resurrected.” Thereafter, “he ascended into heaven” in order to “sit at the right hand of the Father,” and he will reign forever and have dominion over all creatures. He will sanctify those who believe in him by sending into their hearts the Holy Spirit, who will rule, console, and make them alive and defend them against the devil and the power of sin.

The same Christ will publicly “return to judge the living and the dead . . . ,” according to the Apostles’ Creed.

[IV. Concerning Justification]

Likewise, they teach that human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift⁴⁵ on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace⁵² and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins.⁵³ God reckons this faith as righteousness (Rom. 3[:21–26*] and 4[:5*]).

[V. Concerning Ministry in the Church]

So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel, that is to say, in those who hear that God, not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace on account of Christ. Galatians 3[:14b*]: [“So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”](#)⁵⁴

They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to human beings without the external Word through their own preparations and works.

[VI. Concerning the New Obedience]

Likewise, they teach that this faith is bound to yield good fruits and that it ought to do good works commanded by God on account of God’s will and not so that we may trust in these works to merit justification before God. For forgiveness of sins and justification are taken hold of by faith, as the saying of Christ also testifies [Luke 17:10*]: [“When you have done all \[things\] . . . say, ‘We are worthless slaves.’”](#) [The authors of the ancient church teach the same. For Ambrose says: “It is established by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved without work, by faith alone, receiving the forgiveness of sins as a gift.”](#)

[VII. Concerning the Church]

Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. As Paul says [Eph. 4:5*, 6*]: [“One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all . . .”](#)

[VIII. What Is the Church?]

Although the church is, properly speaking, the assembly of saints and those who truly believe, nevertheless, because in this life many hypocrites and evil people are mixed in with them, a person may use the sacraments even when they are administered by evil people. This accords with the saying of Christ [Matt. 23:2*]: [“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. . . .”](#) [Both the sacraments and the Word](#) are efficacious because of the ordinance and command of Christ, even when offered by evil people.

They condemn the Donatists and others like them who have denied that the ministry of evil people may be used in the church and who have thought that the ministry of evil people is useless and ineffective.

[IX. Concerning Baptism]

Concerning baptism they teach that it is necessary for salvation, that the grace of God is offered through baptism, and that children should be baptized. They are received into the grace of God when they are offered to God through baptism.

They condemn the Anabaptists who disapprove of the baptism of children and assert that children are saved without baptism.

[X. Concerning the Supper of the Lord]

Concerning the Lord's Supper they teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present and are distributed to those who eat the Lord's Supper. They disapprove of those who teach otherwise.

[XI. Concerning Confession]

Concerning confession they teach that private absolution should be retained in the churches, although an enumeration of all faults in confession is not necessary. For this is impossible according to the psalm [19:12*]: [“But who can detect their errors?”](#)

[XII. Concerning Repentance]⁶⁸

Concerning repentance they teach that those who have fallen after baptism can receive forgiveness of sins whenever they are brought to repentance⁶⁹ and that the church should impart absolution to those who return to repentance. Now, properly speaking, repentance consists of two parts: one is contrition or the terrors that strike the conscience when sin is recognized; the other is faith, which is brought to life by the gospel or absolution. This faith believes that sins are forgiven on account of Christ, consoles the conscience, and liberates it from terrors.⁷⁰ Thereupon good works, which are the fruit of repentance, should follow.

They condemn both the Anabaptists, who deny that those who have once been justified can lose the Holy Spirit, and also those who contend that some may attain such perfection in this life that they cannot sin.

Also condemned are the Novatians who were unwilling to absolve those who had fallen and returned to repentance after baptism.

Also rejected are those who do not teach that forgiveness of sins comes through faith but command us to merit grace through our own satisfactions. *Also rejected are those who teach that canonical satisfactions are necessary to remit eternal punishment or the punishment of purgatory.*⁷⁹

[XIII. Concerning the Use of Sacraments]

Concerning the use of sacraments they teach that sacraments were instituted not only to be marks of profession among human beings but much more to be signs and testimonies of God's

will toward us, intended to arouse and strengthen faith in those who use them. Accordingly, sacraments are to be used so that faith, which believes the promises offered and displayed through the sacraments, may increase.

Therefore they also condemn those who teach that the sacraments justify *ex opere operato* and do not teach that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven, is required in the use of sacraments.⁸⁰

[XIV. Concerning Church Order]

Concerning church order they teach that no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless properly called.⁸¹

[XV. Concerning Church Rites]

Concerning church rites they teach that those rites should be observed that can be observed without sin and that contribute to peace and good order in the church, for example, certain holy days, festivals, and the like.

However, people are reminded not to burden consciences, as if such worship were necessary for salvation.

They are also reminded that human traditions that are instituted to win God's favor, merit grace, and make satisfaction for sins are opposed to the gospel and the teaching of faith. That is why vows and traditions concerning foods and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the gospel.

[XVI. Concerning Civic Affairs]

Concerning civic affairs they teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God and that Christians are permitted to hold civil office, to work in law courts, to decide matters by imperial and other existing laws, to impose just punishments, to wage just war, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to take an oath when required by magistrates, to take a wife, to be given in marriage.⁸⁹

They condemn the Anabaptists who prohibit Christians from assuming such civil responsibilities.

Because the gospel transmits an eternal righteousness of the heart, they also condemn those who locate evangelical perfection⁹⁰ not in the fear of God and in faith but in abandoning civil responsibilities. In the meantime the gospel does not undermine government or family but completely requires both their preservation as ordinances of God and the exercise of love in these ordinances. Consequently, Christians owe obedience to their magistrates and laws except when commanded to sin. For then they owe greater obedience to God than to human beings (Acts 5[:29*]).

[XVII. Concerning the Return of Christ for Judgment]

They also teach that at the consummation of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will bring to life all the dead. He will give eternal life and endless joy to the righteous and elect, but he will condemn the ungodly and the devils to endless torment.

They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned human beings and devils.

They also condemn others who are now spreading Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly will take possession of the kingdom of the world, while the ungodly are suppressed everywhere.

[XVIII. Concerning Free Will]

Concerning free will they teach that the human will has some freedom for producing civil righteousness and for choosing things subject to reason. However, it does not have the power to produce the righteousness of God or spiritual righteousness without the Holy Spirit, because “those who are natural do not receive the gifts of God’s Holy Spirit” [1 Cor. 2:14*]. [But this righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word.](#) In Book III of *Hypognosticon* Augustine says this in just so many words: “We confess that all human beings have a free will that possesses the judgment of reason. It does not enable them, without God, to begin—much less complete—anything that pertains to God, but only to perform the good or evil deeds of this life. By ‘good deeds’ I mean those that arise from the good in nature, that is, the will to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to wear clothes, to build a house, to marry, to raise cattle, to learn various useful skills, or to do whatever good pertains to this life. None of these exists without divine direction; indeed, from him and through him they have come into being and exist. However, by ‘evil deeds’ I mean the will to worship an idol, to commit murder, etc.”

They condemn the Pelagians and others¹⁰⁰ who teach that without the Holy Spirit by the powers of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things and can also keep the commandments of God “according to the substance of the acts.”¹⁰¹ Although nature can in some measure produce external works—for it can keep the hands from committing theft or murder—nevertheless it cannot produce internal movements, such as fear of God, trust in God, patience, etc.¹⁰²

[XIX. Concerning the Cause of Sin]

Concerning the cause of sin they teach that although God creates and preserves nature, nevertheless the cause of sin is the will of those who are evil, that is, of the devil and the ungodly. Since it was not assisted by God, their will turned away from God, as Christ says in John 8[:44*], [“When \[the devil\] lies, he speaks according to his own nature.”](#)

[XX. Concerning Faith and Good Works]

Our people are falsely accused of prohibiting good works. For their writings on the Decalogue and others on similar subjects bear witness that they have given useful instruction concerning all kinds and walks of life: what manner of life and which activities in every calling please God. In former times preachers taught too little about such things. Instead, they urged childish and needless works, such as particular holy days and fasts, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, the cult of the saints, rosaries, monasticism, and the like. Since our adversaries have been reminded about these things, they are now unlearning them and do not preach about such

useless works as much as in former times. They are also beginning to mention faith, about which there once was an astonishing silence. They teach that we are not justified by works alone, but they combine faith and works, saying that we are justified by both. This teaching is more tolerable than the previous one and can offer more consolation than their old teaching.

Therefore, because the teaching concerning faith, which ought to be the principal one in the church, has languished so long in obscurity—everyone must grant that there has been a profound silence concerning the righteousness of faith in preaching while only the teaching of works has been promoted in the church—our people have instructed the churches about faith in the following way:

To begin with,¹⁰⁵ they remind the churches that our works cannot reconcile God or merit grace and forgiveness of sins, but we obtain this only by faith when we believe that we are received into grace on account of Christ, who alone has been appointed mediator and atoning sacrifice through whom the Father is reconciled. Therefore, all who trust that they merit grace by works despise the merit and grace of Christ and seek a way to God without Christ through human powers, since Christ has said about himself [John 14:6a*]: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

This teaching concerning faith is treated in Paul everywhere. Ephesians 2[:8–9*]: [“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is . . . not the result of works. . . .”](#)

So that no one may quibble that we have contrived a new interpretation of Paul, this entire approach is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers. In many writings Augustine defends grace and the righteousness of faith against the merit of works. Ambrose teaches similar things in *Concerning the Calling of the Gentiles* and elsewhere. For in *Concerning the Calling of the Gentiles*¹⁰⁶ he says: “Redemption by the blood of Christ would become worthless and the preference for human works would not give way to the mercy of God if justification, which takes place by grace, were due to antecedent merits. For then it would be the worker’s wage rather than the donor’s gift.”

Moreover, although this teaching is despised by those without experience, nevertheless devout and anxious consciences find by experience that it offers the greatest consolation. For consciences cannot be calmed by any work, but only by faith when they are certain that they have a God who has been reconciled on account of Christ. As Paul teaches in Romans 5[:1*]: [“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God.” This whole teaching must be referred to that struggle of the terrified conscience, and it cannot be understood apart from that struggle. That is why those who are wicked and without](#) experience judge it badly. For they imagine that Christian righteousness is nothing but civil and philosophical righteousness.

In former times, consciences were vexed by the doctrine of works; they did not hear consolation from the gospel. Conscience drove some into the desert, into monasteries, where they hoped to merit grace through the monastic life. Some contrived other works to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins. Consequently, it was essential to pass on and restore this teaching about faith in Christ so that anxious consciences should not be deprived of consolation but know that grace and forgiveness of sins are apprehended by faith in Christ.

People are also reminded that the term “faith” here does not signify only historical knowledge—the kind of faith that the ungodly and the devil have—but that it signifies faith which believes not only the history but also the effect of the history, namely, this article of the forgiveness of sins, that is, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ.

Now all¹¹⁰ who know that they are reconciled to the Father through Christ truly know God, know that God cares for them, and call upon him. In short, they are not without God, as are the heathen. For the devils and the ungodly cannot believe this article of the forgiveness of sins. Hence they hate God as an enemy, do not call upon him, and expect nothing good from him. Augustine also reminds his readers in this way about the word “faith” and teaches that in the Scriptures the word “faith” is to be understood not as knowledge,¹¹¹ such as the ungodly have, but as trust¹¹² that consoles and encourages terrified minds.

Beyond this, our people teach that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should count on meriting grace through them but because it is the will of God. It is only by faith that forgiveness of sins and grace are apprehended. Moreover, because the Holy Spirit is received through faith, consequently hearts are renewed and endowed with new affections¹¹³ so as to be able to do good works. For Ambrose says: “Faith is the mother of the good will and the righteous action.”¹¹⁴ For without the Holy Spirit human powers are full of ungodly affections and are too weak to do good works before God. Besides, they are under the power of the devil, who impels human beings to various sins, ungodly opinions, and manifest crimes. This also may be seen in the philosophers, who, though they tried to live honestly, were still not able to do so but were defiled by many obvious crimes. Such is the weakness of human beings when they govern themselves by human powers alone without faith or the Holy Spirit.

Hence it is readily apparent that no one should accuse this teaching of prohibiting good works. On the contrary, it is rather to be commended for showing how we can do good works. For without faith human nature cannot possibly do the works of the First or Second Commandments. Without faith it does not call upon God, expect anything from God, or bear the cross, but seeks and trusts in human help. Consequently, all kinds of urges and human designs rule in the heart when faith and trust in God are lacking. That is why Christ said (John 15[:5*]): [“Apart from me you can do nothing.” And the church sings: Without your will divine / Naught is in humankind / All innocence is gone.](#)¹¹⁵

[XXI. Concerning the Cult of the Saints]

Concerning the cult of the saints they teach that saints may be remembered in order that we imitate their faith and good works, according to our calling. Thus, the emperor can imitate the example of David in waging war to drive the Turks from our native land. For both of them are kings. However, Scripture does not teach calling on the saints or pleading for help from them. For it sets before us Christ alone as mediator, atoning sacrifice, high priest, and intercessor. He is to be called upon, and he has promised that our prayers will be heard. Furthermore, he strongly approves this worship most of all, namely, that he be called upon in all afflictions. 1 John 2[:1*]: [“But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father. . . .”](#)

[Conclusion of Part One]

This is nearly a complete summary of the teaching among us. As can be seen, there is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church, or from the Roman church, insofar as we can tell from its writers. Because this is so, those who claim that our people are to be regarded as heretics judge too harshly. The entire dissension concerns a few specific abuses, which have crept into the churches without any proper authority. Even if there were some difference in these matters, the bishops should have been so lenient as to bear with us on account of the confession we have now recounted. For even the canons are not so severe as to demand that rites should be the same everywhere,¹²¹ nor have the rites of all churches ever been the same. Nevertheless, the ancient rites are, for the most part, diligently observed among us. For the accusation is false that all ceremonies and ancient ordinances are abolished in our churches. Truth is, there has been a public outcry that certain abuses have become fused to the common rites. Because such abuses could not be approved with a good conscience, they have been corrected to some extent.

Articles in Which an Account Is Given of the Abuses That Have Been Corrected

Since the churches among us do not dissent from the catholic church in any article of faith but only set aside a few abuses that are new and were accepted because of corruption over time contrary to the intention of the canons, we pray that Your Imperial Majesty will graciously hear about the changes and our reasons for them, so that the people may not be compelled to observe these abuses against their conscience. Your Imperial Majesty should not believe those who disseminate shocking false accusations among the people to inflame the hatred of others against our people. First they gave occasion for this disagreement by embittering the minds of good folk. Now they are trying to increase the discord by the same method. For Your Imperial Majesty will undoubtedly discover that the form of teaching and ceremonies among us is more tolerable than what these perverse and malicious people describe. Indeed, the truth cannot be gathered from the rumors of the crowd or the curses of our enemies. However, it can easily be judged that nothing contributes more to preserving the dignity of ceremonies and to cultivating reverence and piety among the people than conducting ceremonies properly in the churches.

[XXII.] Concerning Both Kinds¹²⁸

Both kinds are given to the laity in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper because this usage has the command of the Lord (Matt. 26[:27*]), "[Drink from it, all of you.](#)" Christ here clearly instructs concerning the cup that all should drink.

So that no one would quibble that this pertains only to priests, Paul in Corinthians [11:21*] [cites an example in which it appears that the entire church was using](#) both kinds. This usage continued in the church for a long time. It is not known when or by which authority it was first changed, although Cardinal Cusanus mentions when it was formally approved. Cyprian testifies in several places that the blood was given to the people. Jerome testifies to the same thing, saying: "The priests administer the Eucharist and distribute the blood of Christ to the people." In fact, Pope Gelasius commands that the sacrament should not be divided (dist. 2, *Concerning Consecration*, chap., "We Discover"). Only a quite recent custom holds otherwise. However, it is evident that a custom, introduced contrary to the commands of God, must not be approved, as the canons testify (dist. 8, chap., "Concerning the Truth,"¹³² and the subsequent chapters). In fact, this custom has been accepted not only in defiance of Scripture but also in opposition to the ancient canons and the example of the church. Accordingly, if persons preferred to use both kinds in the sacrament, they should not have been compelled with offense to their conscience to do otherwise. Because dividing the sacrament does not agree with the institution of Christ, the procession, which has been customary up to now, is also omitted among us.

[XXIII.] Concerning the Marriage of Priests

There has been a public outcry concerning the bad examples of priests who have not been continent. On this account Pope Pius is reported to have said that there were some reasons why marriage was taken away from the priests, but that there are much weightier reasons why it should be given back to them. For so writes Platina. Since, then, the priests among us wanted to avoid such public scandals, they took wives and taught that it was lawful for them to marry for the following reasons. In the first place, Paul says [1 Cor. 7:2*, 9b*]: [“But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife,”](#) and again: [“For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.”](#) In the second place, Christ says [Matt. 19:11*], [“Not everyone can accept this teaching,”](#) where he is teaching that not everyone is fit for celibacy, because God created the human being for procreation (Gen. 1[:28*]). [It is not humanly possible to change creation without a singular gift and work of God. Accordingly,](#) those who are not suited for celibacy should marry. For no human law or vow can nullify a command and institution of God. For these reasons our priests teach that it is lawful for them to have wives.

It is also evident that priests in the ancient church were married. For Paul says [1 Tim. 3:2*] [that a married man should be chosen to be bishop. Not until four hundred years ago were priests in](#) Germany compelled to be celibate. In fact, they were so opposed to it that the archbishop of Mainz was almost crushed to death by angry priests in an uprising when he was about to publish the edict of the Roman pontiff on this matter. The matter was handled in such an uncivil manner that not only were future marriages prohibited but existing marriages were also dissolved, even though this was contrary to all laws, divine and human, and even to the canons made by popes and the most celebrated councils.

Inasmuch as the world is growing old and human nature has become weaker, it is fitting to exercise foresight so that no more vices creep into Germany.

Moreover, God instituted marriage to be a remedy against human infirmity. The canons themselves state that the old rigor should occasionally be relaxed on account of human weakness—which is most desirable to have happen in this case. It seems that the churches will soon be short of pastors if marriage is forbidden for too long a time.

But the command of God still exists, the custom of the church is well known, and impure celibacy produces many scandals, adulteries, and other crimes deserving punishment by good magistrates. Despite all that, it is astonishing that such ferocious opposition to the marriage of priests still exists. God has commanded that marriage be held in honor. The laws in all well-ordered nations, even among the heathen, have adorned marriage with highest honors. But now, contrary to the intention of the canons, capital punishment is cruelly imposed—on priests no less!—for no other reason than marriage. Paul calls the prohibition of marriage a teaching of demons (1 Tim. [4:1*, 3*]). [This can easily be understood, now that the prohibition of marriage is defended by such punishments.](#)

However, just as no human law can nullify a command of God, so no vow can do so. Consequently, Cyprian advised that women who could not keep the promise of chastity should marry. These are his words (Book I of Epistle II): “But if they are unwilling or unable to persevere, it is better for them to marry than to fall into the fire through their lusts; they certainly

should not give offense to their brothers and sisters.”

The canons even exercise a measure of fairness toward those who made vows before attaining the proper age, as has been customary to do until now.

[XXIV.] Concerning the Mass

Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. In fact, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns, added for the instruction of the people, are interspersed here and there among the Latin ones. For ceremonies are especially needed in order to teach those who are ignorant. Paul advised [1 Cor. 14:2*, 9*] [that in church a language that is understood by the people should be used. The people have grown accustomed to receiving the sacrament together—all who are fit to do so. This also increases reverence and respect for public ceremonies. For people](#) are admitted only if they first had an opportunity to be examined and heard. The people are also reminded about the dignity and use of the sacrament—how it offers great consolation to anxious consciences—so that they may learn to believe in God and expect and ask for all that is good from God. Such worship pleases God, and such use of the sacrament cultivates piety toward God. So it does not appear that the Mass is held with greater devotion among our adversaries than among us.

However, for a long time there has been a serious public outcry by good people that Masses were being shamefully profaned and devoted to profit. It is public knowledge how widely this abuse extends in all places of worship, what kind of people celebrate Masses only for a revenue or stipend, and how many celebrate contrary to the canons' prohibitions. But Paul severely threatens those who treat the Eucharist unworthily, when he says [1 Cor. 11:27*]: [“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.”](#) Accordingly, [when the priests among us were instructed concerning this sin, private Masses were discontinued](#) among us, since there were hardly any private Masses held except for the sake of profit.

Nor were bishops ignorant of these abuses. If they had corrected them in time there would be less dissension now. By their negligence many vices have been allowed to creep into the church. Now, when it is too late, they are beginning to complain about the calamities in the church, although this tumult was occasioned by those same abuses which had become so obvious they could no longer be tolerated. Great dissensions have arisen concerning the Mass, concerning the sacrament: perhaps the world is being punished for such an enduring profanation of Masses as has been tolerated in the church for many centuries by the very people who could and should have corrected them. For it is written in the Decalogue [Exod. 20:7*]: [“The Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.”](#) [Since the beginning of the world no divine matter seems ever to have been so devoted to profit as the Mass.](#)

The following view increased private Masses without end: Christ had by his passion made satisfaction for original sin and had instituted the Mass in which an offering might be made for daily sins, mortal and venial. From this came the common opinion that the Mass is a work which *ex opere operato*¹⁵⁰ blots out the sins of the living and the dead. Here began a debate on whether one Mass said for many is worth as much as special Masses for individuals. That de-

bate produced this endless multitude of Masses.

Our people have warned that these opinions do not agree with the Holy Scriptures but instead undermine the glory of Christ's passion. For the passion of Christ was an offering and satisfaction not only for original guilt but for all other remaining sins, as is written in Hebrews [10:10*, 14*]: [“We have been sanctified through the offering](#) of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all,” and, “By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Likewise, Scripture teaches that we are justified before God through faith in Christ. Now if the Mass blots out the sins of the living and the dead *ex opere operato*,¹⁵¹ justification comes from the work of the Mass, not from faith, which Scripture does not allow.

But Christ commands that it be done in memory of him.¹⁵² The Mass, therefore, was instituted so that the faith of those who use the sacrament should recall what benefits are received through Christ and should encourage and console the anxious conscience. For to remember Christ is to remember his benefits and realize that they are truly offered to us.¹⁵³ It is not enough to remember the history, because the Jews and the ungodly can also remember that. The Mass is to be used for the purpose of offering the sacrament to those who need consolation, just as Ambrose says: “Because I always sin, I ought always to take the medicine.”¹⁵⁴

Since the Mass is such an imparting of the sacrament, among us one common Mass is held on every holy day, and it is also administered on other days if there are those who desire it. Nor is this custom new in the church. For the ancient teachers before the time of Gregory¹⁵⁵ do not mention private Masses, but often speak of the common Mass. Chrysostom says that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to Communion and keeping others away. And it is apparent from the ancient canons that one person celebrated the Mass, from whom the rest of the presbyters and deacons received the body of Christ. For the words of the Nicene canon read: “Let the deacons receive Holy Communion in order after the presbyters from the bishop or from a presbyter.” Concerning Communion Paul also commands [1 Cor. 11:33*] [that people should wait for one another so that there may be a common participation.](#)

Since, therefore, the Mass as we conduct it has on its side the example of the church, from Scripture and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disapproved, especially since the customary public ceremonies are for the most part retained. Only the number of Masses is different, and on account of the great and manifest abuses it would certainly be good to limit them. For in former times Mass was not celebrated every day, even in churches frequented most, as the *Tripartite History*, Book IX, testifies: “But again, in Alexandria, Scriptures are read on Wednesday and Friday and the teachers interpret them, and everything is done except the solemn practice of the Offering.”¹⁵⁹

[XXV.] Concerning Confession

Confession has not been abolished in our churches. For it is not customary to administer the body of Christ except to those who have been previously examined and absolved. The people are also most diligently taught concerning faith in the word of absolution, about which there was a great silence before now. People are taught to make the most of absolution because it is the voice of God and is pronounced following the command of God. The power of the keys is praised and remembered for bringing such great consolation to terrified consciences, both be-

cause God requires faith so that we believe such absolution as God's own voice resounding from heaven and because this faith truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins. In former times, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; nothing was mentioned about faith, the merits of Christ, or the righteousness of faith. On this point our churches can scarcely be faulted. For even our adversaries are compelled to grant us that the teaching concerning confession has been most carefully treated and brought to light by our people.

What is more, they teach concerning confession that an enumeration of faults is not necessary and that consciences should not be burdened with the anxiety of having to enumerate all their faults. For it is impossible to recite every misdeed, as the psalm [19:12*] testifies: "[Who can detect their errors?](#)" And Jeremiah [17:9*]: "[The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse.](#)" But if no sins were forgiven except those which are recounted aloud, consciences could never find peace, because many sins cannot be seen or remembered. The ancient writers also testify that such enumeration is not necessary. For Chrysostom is quoted in the canons as saying: "I do not say that you should appear in public or should accuse yourself before others. But I want you to obey the prophet who says [Ps. 37:5*, *Vulgate*], '[Reveal your way before the Lord.](#)' Therefore, confess your sins to God, the true judge, with prayer. Declare your sins not with the tongue but with the memory of your conscience." The marginal note in *Concerning Confession* (dist. 5, chap., "Consider") admits that confession is a matter of human law. Nevertheless, confession is retained among us both because of the great benefit of absolution and because of other advantages for consciences.

[XXVI.] Concerning the Distinction of Foods

It has been a general conviction, not only of the people but also of those who teach in the churches, that distinction of foods and similar human traditions are useful works for meriting grace and making satisfaction for sins. That the world thought so is evident from the fact that daily new ceremonies, new ordinances, new holy days, and new fasts were instituted and that the teachers in places of worship exacted these works as necessary worship for meriting grace and viciously terrified consciences if people omitted any of them. Much misfortune has ensued in the church from this conviction concerning traditions.

In the first place, it has obscured the teaching concerning grace and the righteousness of faith, which is the chief part of the gospel and which ought to be present and prominent in the church so that the merit of Christ is well-known and that faith, which believes in the forgiveness of sins on account of Christ, may be exalted far above works and other acts of worship. That is why Paul puts the greatest weight on this article and removes the law and human traditions to show that Christian righteousness is something other than works of this kind. Christian righteousness is faith that believes we are received into grace on account of Christ. This teaching of Paul has been almost completely smothered by traditions, which have given rise to the opinion that grace and righteousness are supposed to be merited through distinctions of food and similar acts of worship. No mention of faith was made in the practice of repentance;¹⁶⁴ only these works of satisfaction were proposed. The whole of repentance was thought to consist of them.

In the second place, these traditions obscured the precepts of God because traditions were

preferred far more than the precepts of God. All Christianity was thought to consist of the observance of certain holy days, rites, fasts, and vestments. These observances possessed the most distinguished titles because they were the “spiritual life” and the “perfect life.” Meanwhile the commands of God pertaining to one’s calling were not praised: that the head of the household should rear the children, that a mother should bear them, that a prince should govern his country. These were considered as “worldly” and “imperfect” works, far inferior to those splendid observances. This error greatly tormented pious consciences. They grieved that they were bound to an imperfect kind of life: in marriage, in government, or in other civil functions. They admired the monks and others like them and falsely imagined that the observances of such people were more pleasing to God.

In the third place, traditions brought great dangers to consciences because it was impossible to keep them all, and yet people judged these observances to be necessary acts of worship. Gerson writes that many fell into despair, and some even took their own lives because they felt that they could not keep the traditions. Meanwhile, they never heard the consolation that comes from the righteousness of faith and from grace. We see that the summists and theologians collected the traditions, looking for a fair and gentle solution¹⁷¹ for consciences. They did not altogether succeed; instead, in the process they entangled consciences even more. Schools¹⁷² and sermons were so busy gathering traditions that they had no time even to mention Scripture or to look for more useful teachings concerning faith, the cross, hope, the dignity of civil affairs, and the consolation of consciences in adverse temptations. Hence Gerson and certain other theologians bitterly complained that they were so bogged down by these quarrels over traditions that they could not turn their attention to a better kind of teaching. Augustine also forbids burdening consciences with such observances and prudently reminds Januarius that these things must be observed as an indifferent matter; that is what he said.

Our people, therefore, must not be viewed as having taken up this cause by chance or because they hate bishops, as some wrongly suspect. There was great need to warn the churches of those errors which had grown out of a misunderstanding of traditions. For the gospel compels us to insist in the church on the teaching concerning grace and the righteousness of faith, which can never be understood if human beings think that they merit grace by observances of their own choice.

So they teach that we cannot merit grace or make satisfaction for sins through the observance of human traditions. Hence observances of this kind are not to be thought of as necessary acts of worship. They add testimonies from Scripture. In Matthew 15[:1–20*] [Christ defends the apostles for not observing a customary tradition](#), despite the fact that it was considered a neutral matter¹⁷⁶ and to have a connection with the purifications of the law. However, he says [Matt. 15:9*]: [“In vain do they worship me” with human precepts. So he does not require a useless act of worship.](#) Shortly thereafter he says [Matt. 15:11*]: [“It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person.”](#) Again, Romans 14[:17*]: [“For the kingdom of God is not food and drink.”](#) Colossians 2[:16*]: [“Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals . . . or sabbaths.”](#) Again [Col. 2:20–21*]: [“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’?”](#)¹⁷⁷ Pe-

ter 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 prohibits the burdening of consciences with additional rites, whether of Moses or others. And 1 Timothy 4[:1–3*] [calls the prohibition](#) of food teachings of demons because to institute or perform such works for the purpose of meriting grace through them or to think that Christian righteousness might not be able to exist without such acts of worship conflicts with the gospel.

Here our adversaries charge that our people, like Jovinian, prohibit discipline and the mortification of the flesh. But something quite different may be detected in the writings of our people. For concerning the cross they have always taught that Christians should endure afflictions. To be disciplined by various afflictions and crucified with Christ is a true and serious, not a simulated, mortification.

In addition, they teach that all Christians should so train and restrain themselves with bodily discipline, or bodily exercises and labors, that neither overexertion nor idleness may lure them to sin. But they do not teach that we merit forgiveness of sins or make satisfaction for them through such exercises. Such bodily discipline should always be encouraged, not only on a few prescribed days. As Christ commands [Luke 21:34*]: [“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation.”](#) Again [Mark 9:29*]: [“This kind \[of demon\] can come out only through prayer and fasting.”](#) And Paul says: [“I punish my body and enslave it”](#) [1 Cor. 9:27*]. [Here he clearly shows that he punished his body not to merit forgiveness of sins through such discipline but to keep the body under control and fit for spiritual things and to carry out his responsibilities according to his calling.](#) Therefore, fasting itself is not condemned, but traditions that prescribe, with peril to conscience, certain days and foods, as if works of this kind were necessary acts of worship.

Nevertheless, many traditions are kept among us, such as the order of readings in the Mass, holy days, etc., which are conducive to maintaining good order in the church. But at the same time, people are warned that such acts of worship do not justify before God and that no punishable sin is committed if they are omitted without offense. Such freedom in human rites was not unknown to the Fathers. For in the East, Easter was kept at a different time than in Rome, and when the Romans accused the East of schism because of this difference, they were admonished by others that such customs need not be alike everywhere. Irenaeus says, “Disagreement about fasting does not dissolve the unity in faith,” and Pope Gregory¹⁸³ indicates (dist. 12) that such diversity does not damage the unity of the church. In the *Tripartite History*, Book IX, many examples of dissimilar rites are collected, and this statement is made: “It was not the intention of the apostles to make decrees about festivals but to preach good conduct among people and godliness.”

[XXVII.] Concerning Monastic Vows

What is taught among us concerning monastic vows will be better understood if it is remembered what the condition of the monasteries was and how much was done every day in these monasteries that was contrary to the canons. In Augustine’s time they were voluntary as-

sociations. Afterward, wherever discipline became corrupt, vows were added for the purpose of restoring discipline, as in a carefully planned prison.

Many other observances were gradually added to the existing vows. Moreover, these chains were put on many, contrary to the canons, before they had reached legal age. Many entered this kind of life mistakenly, for even though they were old enough, they could not assess their own strengths. Those who were thus entangled were compelled to remain, even though some could have been freed by appealing to the canons. This was more the case in the monasteries of women than in those of men, although the weaker gender should have been the more spared. Such rigor displeased many good people before our time. They saw girls and boys thrust into monasteries for the sake of survival. They saw the unfortunate results of such an arrangement, what scandals it created, and what snares were laid for consciences. They regretted that in this most perilous matter the authority of the canons was completely neglected and despised. To make matters worse, vows had such a reputation that it clearly displeased those monks of former times who were a little wiser.

People said that vows were equal to baptism, and they taught that vows merited forgiveness of sins and justification before God through this kind of life. Indeed, they added that monastic life merited not only righteousness before God but even more: that it kept not only precepts but also the Evangelical counsels. In this way they were convinced that the monastic profession was far better than baptism and that the monastic life was more meritorious than the life of magistrates, pastors, and the like, who are subject to God's commands in their callings without artificial religious observance. None of these things can be denied, for they appear in their books.

What happened later on in the monasteries? In former times they were schools of Holy Scripture and of other subjects useful to the church; bishops and pastors were taken from there. Now everything is different, and it is unnecessary to present an account of what is well known. In former times they were suitable places for learning. Now people pretend that this kind of life was instituted to merit grace and righteousness. Indeed, they proclaim that it is a state of perfection, and they greatly prefer it above all other kinds of life instituted by God. For this reason we have recounted these things, while exaggerating nothing out of malice, so that the teaching of our people concerning this matter may be better understood.

In the first place,¹⁹² concerning those who marry our people teach that this is lawful for all who are not fit for celibacy, because vows cannot abrogate the institution and command of God. Moreover, this is the command of God [1 Cor. 7:2*]: "[Because of cases of](#) sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife." Not only God's command, but also God's creation and institution drive those into marriage who, apart from a special work of God, are not exempted according to Genesis 2[:18*]: "[It is not good that th](#)e man should be alone." Consequently, those who comply with this command and institution of God do not sin.

What objection can be raised to this? No matter how anyone exaggerates the obligation of a vow, it still cannot be made to abrogate the command of God. The canons teach that every vow is subject to the right of a superior. How much less valid are the vows that are contrary to the commands of God!

Now if the obligation of vows could not be changed for any reasons, the Roman pontiffs would not have granted dispensations. For it is not lawful for a human being to repeal an obligation that is plainly a matter of divine right. However, the Roman pontiffs have prudently decided that such an obligation should be treated with fairness. That is why we read that they often granted dispensation from vows. Indeed, the story of the king of Aragon, who was recalled from a monastery, is well known, and there is no lack of examples in our time.

Furthermore, why do our adversaries exaggerate the obligation or effect of a vow while remaining silent about the nature of this vow, which should be in the realm of possibility, voluntary, and chosen freely and deliberately? Yet it is not known to what extent perpetual chastity is within human capability. How many have taken the vow voluntarily and deliberately? Girls and boys are persuaded—sometimes even compelled—to take the vow before they are able to judge. That is why it is not fair to debate so narrow-mindedly about obligation, when everyone concedes that it is contrary to the nature of the vow to make a promise that is neither voluntary nor deliberate.

Many canons annul vows contracted before the age of fifteen, because before such an age a person does not seem to have sufficient judgment concerning the rest of his or her life. Another canon, conceding more to human frailty, adds a few years, since it prohibits taking a vow before the age of eighteen. But whether we follow the one or the other, the overwhelming majority have an excuse to leave the monastery since many took vows before they reached such an age.

Finally, even though the violation of the vow could perhaps be censured, still it does not seem to follow immediately that the marriages of such people ought to be dissolved. For Augustine (cited in c. 27, q. 1, chap., “Of Marriages”) denies that they should be dissolved. His authority is not inconsiderable, although others have subsequently differed from him.

Moreover, although God’s command concerning marriage appears to free many from their vows, our people offer still another reason why vows may be invalid: every service of God instituted and chosen by human beings without the command of God, in order to merit justification and grace, is ungodly, just as Christ says [Matt. 15:9*]: [“In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.”](#) Paul also teaches everywhere that righteousness is not to be sought in our observances or acts of worship devised by human beings, but that it comes through faith to those who believe that they are received by God into grace on account of Christ.

However, very clearly the monks have taught that their humanly invented observances make satisfaction for sins and merit grace and justification. What is this but to detract from the glory of Christ and to obscure and deny the righteousness of faith? It follows, therefore, that such customary vows were ungodly acts of worship and are invalid for that reason. For an ungodly vow made contrary to God’s command is invalid. For no vow ought to be a bond of iniquity, as the canon says.

Paul says [Gal. 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 fall away from Christ and are cut off from grace. For those who ascribe justification to vows, ascribe to their own works what properly belongs to the glory of Christ. It cannot be de-

nied that the monks taught that they were justified and merited forgiveness of sins through vows and observances. In fact, they added greater absurdities to this when they boasted that they could transfer their works to others. If anyone wants to exaggerate this out of hatred, how much could be collected about which the monks themselves would be ashamed! Moreover, they persuaded people that their humanly invented observances constituted a state of Christian perfection. Is this not ascribing justification to works? It is no minor scandal in the church to propose to the people a certain act of worship invented by human beings without a command of God and to teach that such worship justifies human beings. For the righteousness of faith, which ought to be taught in the church most of all, is obscured when these astonishing angelic observances and this pretense of poverty, humility, and celibacy are blinding people.

Furthermore, the precepts of God and true worship of God are obscured when people hear that only monks are in a state of perfection. For Christian perfection means earnestly to fear God and, at the same time, to have great faith and to trust that we have a gracious God on account of Christ; to ask for and to expect with certainty help from God in all things that are to be borne in connection with our calling; and, in the meantime, diligently to do good works for others and to serve in our calling. True perfection and true worship of God consist in all these things, not in celibacy, mendicancy, or shabby clothing. On that account, the people form many pernicious opinions from such false commendations of monastic life. They hear celibacy praised without restraint, and so they live in marriage with a troubled conscience. They hear that only mendicants are perfect, and so they keep their possessions or engage in business with a troubled conscience. They hear that it is an Evangelical counsel not to take revenge, and so some are not afraid to take vengeance in their private lives, since they are told that this is prohibited by a counsel and not by a precept. Others err still more, for they judge that all magistracy and all civil offices are unworthy of Christians and in conflict with an Evangelical counsel.

Cases can be read of people who, deserting marriage and participation in the administration of the state, withdrew into a monastery. They called this “fleeing from the world” and “seeking a holy kind of life.” They did not see that God is to be served in those commands he himself has handed down, not in commands invented by human beings. The good and perfect kind of life is one that has God’s command. It was necessary for people to be instructed about these matters.

Before our time, Gerson, too, reproved the error of the monks concerning perfection and testified that it was a novelty in his day to say that the monastic life was a state of perfection.

So there are many ungodly opinions attached to vows: that they justify, that they constitute Christian perfection, that monks keep both the counsels and precepts, that they do works of supererogation. All these things, because they are false and without substance, make vows invalid.

[XXVIII.] Concerning the Church’s Power

In former times, there were serious controversies about the power of bishops, in which some people improperly mixed the power of the church and the power of the sword. Tremendous wars and rebellions resulted from this confusion, while the pontiffs, relying on the power of the keys, not only instituted new forms of worship and burdened consciences with reserva-

tions of cases and violent excommunications but also attempted to transfer earthly kingdoms and to take away from emperors the right to rule. Devout and learned people have long since condemned these vices in the church. That is why our people have been compelled, for the sake of instructing consciences, to show the difference between the power of the church and the power of the sword. They have taught that because of the command of God both are to be devoutly respected and honored as the highest blessings of God on earth.

However, they believe that, according to the gospel, the power of the keys or the power of the bishops is the power of God's mandate to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer 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.”](#) And Mark 16[15*]: [“Go . . . and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. . . .”](#)

This power is exercised only by teaching or preaching the gospel and by administering the sacraments either to many or to individuals, depending on one's calling. For not bodily things but eternal things, eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, eternal life, are being given. These things cannot come about except through the ministry of Word and sacraments, as Paul says [Rom. 1:16*]: [“The gospel . . . is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.”](#) And Psalm 119[50*]: [“Your promise gives me life.”](#) Therefore, since this power of the church bestows eternal things and is exercised only through the ministry of the Word, it interferes with civil government as little as the art of singing interferes with it. For civil government is concerned with things other than the gospel. For the magistrate protects not minds but bodies and goods from manifest harm and constrains people with the sword and physical penalties. The gospel protects minds from ungodly ideas, the devil, and eternal death.

Consequently, the powers of church and civil government must not be mixed. The power of the church possesses its own command to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. It should not usurp the other's duty, transfer earthly kingdoms, abrogate the laws of magistrates, abolish lawful obedience, interfere with judgments concerning any civil ordinances or contracts, prescribe to magistrates laws concerning the form of government that should be established. As Christ says [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 says in Philippians 3[20*], [“Our citizenship is in heaven,”](#) and in 2 Corinthians 10[4*]: [“For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy . . . arguments. . . .”](#)

In this way our people distinguish the duties of the two powers, and they command that both be held in honor and acknowledged as a gift and blessing of God.

If bishops possess any power of the sword, they possess it not through a command of the gospel but by human right, granted by kings and emperors for the civil administration of their lands. This, however, is a different function from the ministry of the gospel.

So, when asking about the jurisdiction of bishops, one must distinguish political rule from the church's jurisdiction. Consequently, according to the gospel, or, as they say, by divine right, this jurisdiction belongs to the bishops as bishops (that is, to those to whom the ministry of Word and sacraments has been committed): to forgive sins, to reject teaching that opposes the gospel, and to exclude from the communion of the church the ungodly whose ungodliness is

known—doing all this not with human power but by the Word. In this regard, churches are bound by divine right to be obedient to the bishops, according to the saying [Luke 10:16*], [“Whoever listens to you listens to me.”](#)

However, when they teach or establish anything contrary to the gospel, churches have a command from God that prohibits obedience. Matthew 7[:15*]: [“Beware of false prophets.”](#) Galatians 1[:8*]: [“If . . . an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!”](#) 2 Corinthians 13[:8*, 10*]: [“For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth,”](#) and, [“Using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.”](#)The canons require the same thing in Part II, q. 7, chaps. “Priests” and “Sheep.” Augustine also says in the letter against Petilian that one should not agree with catholic bishops if they perchance should err and hold anything contrary to the canonical Scriptures of God.

If they possess any other power or jurisdiction in deciding certain cases (for example, concerning marriage or tithes, etc.), they have it by human right. Wherever these overseers leave off doing such things, princes are compelled—even against their will—to administer justice to their subjects for the sake of maintaining public peace.

Moreover, it is debated whether bishops or pastors have the right to institute ceremonies in the church and make laws concerning food, holy days, ranks or orders of ministers, etc. Those who attribute this right to bishops cite this testimony [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 will guide you into all the truth.”](#) They also cite the example of the apostles [Acts 15:20*, 29*] who [commanded abstinence from blood and from what is strangled](#). The sabbath, which—contrary to the Decalogue, it seems—was changed to Sunday, is also cited. No example is brought up more often than this change of the sabbath. Great, they contend, is the power of the church, that it dispensed with a commandment of the Decalogue!

However, concerning this question, our people teach, as has been shown above, that bishops do not have the power to establish anything contrary to the gospel. The canons disclose this throughout dist. 9. Furthermore, it is contrary to Scripture to establish traditions in order that, by observing them, we may make satisfaction for sins and merit justification. For the glory of Christ’s merit is violated when we think that we are justified by such observances. However, it is evident that because of this notion countless traditions have arisen in the church, while the teaching concerning faith and the righteousness of faith has been suppressed. For repeatedly more holy days were created, fasts were announced, and new ceremonies and orders were instituted, because the authors of these things imagined that they merited grace through such works. So the penitential canons increased in former times, and we can still see traces of them in the satisfactions.

Again, the authors of traditions act contrary to the command of God when they attach sin to food, days, and similar things and burden the church with the bondage of the law, as if, in order to merit justification, there had to be acts of worship among Christians similar to the Levitical ones, and as if God had commissioned the apostles and bishops to institute them. For some have written this way, and the pontiffs seem to have been deceived in some measure by the example of the Law of Moses. From this came burdens such as these: that it is a mortal sin to do

manual labor on holy days, even when it does not offend others; that certain foods pollute the conscience; that fasting, when it is not natural but inflicts bodily pain, is a work pleasing to God; that it is a mortal sin to omit the canonical hours; that in a reserved case a sin cannot be forgiven without the approval of the person who has reserved the case, although the canons themselves do not speak here about reserving guilt but only of reserving ecclesiastical penalties.

Where did the bishops get the right to impose such traditions on the churches in order to ensnare consciences? Given the fact that Peter prohibits putting a yoke on the disciples and Paul says that they were given power to build up not to tear down, why do they increase sins through such traditions?

Nevertheless, there are clear testimonies that prohibit the establishment of traditions for the purpose of appeasing God or as if they were necessary for salvation. Paul says in Colossians 2[:16*, 20–23*]: [“Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths,”](#) and, [“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.”](#) Titus 1[:14*]: [“Not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of those who reject the truth . . .”](#)

Christ says in Matthew 15[:14*], [concerning those who require traditions: “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.” And he rejects such acts of worship \[Matt. 15:13*\]: “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.”](#)

If bishops have the right to burden consciences with such traditions, why does Scripture so often prohibit the establishment of traditions? Why does it call them teachings of demons? Did the Holy Spirit warn against them in vain?

Therefore, it follows that it is not lawful for bishops to institute such acts of worship or require them as necessary, because ordinances that are instituted as necessary or with the intention of meriting justification conflict with the gospel. For it is necessary to retain the teaching concerning Christian freedom in the churches, that bondage to the law is not necessary for justification, as it is written in Galatians [5:1*]: [“Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” It is necessary to retain the chief article of the gospel: that we obtain grace through faith in Christ, not through certain observances or through acts of worship instituted by human beings.](#)

What, therefore, should one think of Sunday and similar rites in places of worship? To this our people reply that it is lawful for bishops or pastors to establish ordinances so that things are done in the church in an orderly fashion, not so that we may make satisfaction for our sins through them or so that consciences may be obliged to regard them as necessary acts of worship. Thus, Paul ordered that women should cover their heads in the assembly [1 Cor. 11:5*] [and that interpreters should be heard in the church in an orderly way \[1 Cor. 14:30*\].](#)

It is fitting for the churches to comply with such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquillity and to keep them insofar as they do not offend others. Thus, everything may be done in an orderly fashion in the churches without confusion, but in such a way that consciences are

not burdened by thinking such things are necessary for salvation or that they sin when violating them without offense. Just as no one would say that a woman commits a sin by leaving the house with her head uncovered in an inoffensive way.

Such is the case with the observance of Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, and similar festivals and rites. For those who judge that the necessary observance of Sunday in place of the sabbath was instituted by the church's authority are mistaken. Scripture, not the church, abrogated the sabbath. For after the revelation of the gospel all Mosaic ceremonies can be omitted. Yet, since it was necessary to establish a certain day so that the people would know when they should assemble, it appears that the church designated Sunday for this purpose. Apparently, this was even more pleasing because people would have an example of Christian freedom and would know that it was not necessary to keep either the sabbath or any other day.

There are still tremendous debates concerning the change of the law, concerning ceremonies of the new law, concerning the change of the sabbath, all of which have arisen from the false assumption that worship in the church should be like the Levitical worship and that Christ commissioned the apostles and bishops to devise new ceremonies that were necessary for salvation. These errors crept into the church when the righteousness of faith was not taught with sufficient clarity. Some argue that the observance of Sunday is not "in fact" of divine right, but "as if it were" of divine right, and they prescribe to what extent one is allowed to work on holy days. What are debates of this kind but snares for consciences? For although they try to bring equity to²²² the traditions, fairness can never be achieved as long as the opinion remains that they are necessary. This opinion necessarily persists where righteousness of faith and Christian freedom are ignored.

The apostles commanded abstention from blood, etc. Who keeps this command now? Those who do not keep it certainly do not sin, because the apostles did not wish to burden consciences through such bondage. They issued the prohibition for a time to avoid scandal. For the general intention of the gospel must be considered in connection with the decree.

But scarcely any of the canons are observed according to the letter. Many of them become obsolete daily even among those who defend traditions. It is not possible to counsel consciences unless this measure of fairness is preserved. As a result, we know that traditions may be kept as long as they are not held to be necessary and as long as they may not harm consciences, even if human practice changes in such a matter.

However, the bishops could easily retain lawful obedience if they did not insist on keeping traditions that cannot be observed with a good conscience. Now they impose celibacy, and they accept no one unless he swears that he will not teach the pure doctrine of the gospel. Our churches do not ask that the bishops restore concord at the expense of their honor—which, nevertheless, good pastors ought do. They only ask that the bishops relax unjust burdens that are new and were accepted contrary to the custom of the catholic church. Perhaps in the beginning there were acceptable reasons for these ordinances, but they are not suited for later times. It also seems that some were adopted by mistake. Bishops, therefore, could show their clemency by mitigating them, because such change would not threaten the unity of the church. For many human traditions have been changed with the passing of time, as the canons themselves show. But if it is impossible to obtain a relaxation of observances that cannot be kept without

sin, we must obey the apostolic injunction [Acts 5:29*] [which commands us to obey God rather than human beings.](#)

Peter prohibits bishops from domineering over and coercing the churches. The present matter does not involve bishops abandoning their exercise of lordship, but only one thing is requested, namely, that they permit the teaching of the gospel in its purity and relax those few observances that cannot be kept without sin. If they do not do this, they will have to see to it how they will render an account before God, given that they provide a cause for schism by their obstinacy.

[Conclusion]

We have recounted the chief articles that are regarded as controversial. For although more abuses could be mentioned, we have included only the principal ones to avoid prolixity. There have been grave complaints about indulgences, pilgrimages, and the misuse of excommunication. Parishes have been vexed by preachers who sell indulgences. There have been endless quarrels between pastors and monks concerning parochial rights, confessions, burials, and countless other matters. We have omitted matters of this sort so that the chief points, having been briefly set forth, can be more readily understood. Nothing has here been said or related to insult anyone. Only those things have been recounted which seemed to need saying. This was done in order that it may be understood that nothing has been accepted among us, in teaching or ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or the catholic church. For it is manifest that we have most diligently been on guard so that no new or ungodly doctrines creep into our churches.

In accord with the edict of Your Imperial Majesty, we have desired to present the above-mentioned articles. They exhibit our confession and contain a summary of the instruction by our teachers. If anything is found to be lacking in this confession, we are ready, God willing, to present more extensive information according to the Scriptures.

Your Imperial Majesty's faithful and humble [subjects]

JOHN, duke of Saxony, elector

GEORGE, margrave of Brandenburg

ERNEST, With His Own Hand

PHILIP, landgrave of Hesse, subscribes

JOHN FREDERICK, duke of Saxony

FRANCIS, duke of Lüneburg

WOLFGANG, prince of Anhalt

Senate and Mayor of Nuremberg

Senate of Reutlingen

CA The Augsburg Confession (*Confessio Augustana*)

1

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

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⁴⁶ I will also speak of your decrees before kings, and shall not be put to shame;

[Psalm 119:46](#) (NRSV)

⁸This title is found in the 1531 *editio princeps* and in six manuscripts. Two add this note: “Read publicly on the Saturday after the Feast of John the Baptist [i.e., 25 June] after breakfast.” The citation from Psalm 119 most likely comes from Luther’s correspond-

⁹As noted in par. 1, for the emperor and the German public at large the most important issue to be treated at the diet in Augs-

