

# REFORMATION THEOLOGY



**REFORMATION THEOLOGY**  
**A READER OF PRIMARY SOURCES**  
**WITH INTRODUCTIONS**

Edited by Bradford Littlejohn with Jonathan Roberts

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Front cover image taken from Hermann Wislicenus, *Luther vor Karl V. auf dem Reichstag zu Worms 1521* (1880; Imperial Palace of Goslar)

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*Dedicated to the memory of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century martyrs who gave  
their lives for truth and the glory of God*



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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### A Story Worth Retelling

AS THIS book goes to press, the crescendo of Reformation 500 commemorations throughout the Western world is reaching its highest pitch, with innumerable conferences, publications, symposia, blog series, festivals, and more. Protestants are by and large celebrating, while Catholics are mostly trying to remind us how much damage the Reformation did and ecumenists are somberly nodding their heads in agreement. Ordinary educated folks, however, might be forgiven for getting a bit sick of it all. Was the Reformation really quite that big of a deal? We live in a society in which hype is the *lingua franca* of public communication, and cynics might ask whether Reformation 500 is just another instance of it.

And yet, when all the dust of anniversary commemorations settles, the fact will remain that few episodes in Western history have so shaped our world as the Protestant Reformation and the counter-Reformations which accompanied it. From a purely secular standpoint, the political and cultural ramifications were incalculable. Before the Reformation, however many squabbles there may have been between king and pope, society in western Europe was a seamless garment, Christendom, in which every power and authority, and every duty and loyalty could at least theoretically be coordinated in relation to the pole provided by the Church's teaching. After the Reformation, this garment was torn first in two, as the laity and civil authority claimed their own status independent from the clergy and papal authority, and then into more and more pieces as nations and confessions defined themselves against one another.

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The tearing garment metaphor, however, has a rather negative ring to it; more positively, we might characterize the Reformation as a firestorm tearing through an old, stagnant, and dying forest, sowing the seeds for a burst of new and newly diverse life, or as an unchaining, which set the various strata of society and faculties of humanity free to develop under their own power, instead of laboring in obedience to an oppressive hierarchy. It is difficult to deny that the Reformation helped set in motion political reforms, cultural and artistic revitalizations, economic developments, and spiritual renewals that profoundly enriched the life of western Europe and indeed through it the whole world. Even those most inclined to lament the divisions in the church and the putative disenchantment and desacralization of the cosmos initiated by Luther's reforms would hardly wish to return to the superstition, heteronomy, and corruption of the late Middle Ages from which the Reformation announced a deliverance.

Of course, when framing such large narratives, we can hardly claim that it all started in 1517. Many of the trends which burst forth in the Reformation were already well underway from as much as two centuries earlier, as the texts in this book attest, and the religious reforms initiated by Luther took place alongside political and educational reforms, some of which may have happened, or were already happening, anyway. It would be impossible—even if it were desirable—to try to disentangle the various contributions of the Protestant Reformation and Renaissance humanism, so thoroughly were the two phenomena intertwined in nearly every part of Europe that the Reformation touched.

Given the immense range of cultural, political, and educational—not to mention socio-economic—factors contributing to the Reformation, it may seem transgressively old-fashioned to compile a book consisting strictly of theological texts. The nearest equivalent to this volume currently on the market, *A Reformation*

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*Reader*, edited by Denis Janz,<sup>1</sup> does contain numerous small excerpts from theological writings, but fills its pages largely with letters, narratives, and Reformation-era writings on topics as diverse as “The Status of Women” and “Eating, Sleeping, and Dying.” There is no doubt that, for understanding the full lived experience and motivations of the Reformation’s myriad actors, such broad reading is essential. Indeed, the fact that our reader takes a different tack is not so much a dismissal of the approach taken by Janz, but rather a recognition that there is no need to reinvent that particular wheel. However, there *is* still a need in our 21<sup>st</sup>-century context, which has replaced ideas with identity or economics, to return to the importance of theology, of doctrines taught, confessed, and bled and died for, as the beating heart of the Reformation.

Even for secular readers for whom *all* these doctrines are frivolous myths and superstitions, the fact remains that for the men and women at the time, they were matters of truth or falsehood, life or death, heaven or hell. To understand why the Reformation unfolded as it did, we must understand the ideas that were so forcefully articulated, opposed, and debated by Protestants and Catholics. For Protestant or Catholic believers in this forgetful age, the need to understand these disputed doctrines is all the more imperative. And since ideas do not exist in isolation from one another, but have a logic and coherence that links them together, we can and indeed must identify the ideas that were central and foundational, the core principles which, once articulated or challenged, had downstream consequences in the alteration of many other doctrines and religious practices. That is what this volume seeks to offer.

This does not mean, of course, that we should stick to some notion of purely theological concepts like the five *solas* of the Reformation and leave aside all ideas of a practical and political character. On the contrary, the central theological ideas of the

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<sup>1</sup> Denis R. Janz, ed., *A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

Reformation were irreducibly ecclesiological and thus, given the seamless garment of late medieval society, irreducibly political. We have sought to highlight this fact with the selection of texts in this book, particularly in the lead-up to the Reformation. The relative authority of king and pope, and the nature of the church as either a clerocracy or a community of the faithful, were issues just as central to the Reformation as Luther's discovery of salvation by faith alone—indeed, the latter doctrine would have been incoherent had it not been accompanied with a profound rethinking of the nature of the church.

### **Principles of Selection**

The need to produce a Reader of some manageable size and yet to offer a reasonably comprehensive overview of what the Reformation was all about posed some daunting challenges when it came to selecting appropriate texts. Our first principle was to eschew the approach of Janz (who includes no less than 122 texts, averaging just a couple of pages each) and include excerpts long enough to give the reader a good grasp of the larger argument and issues at stake. We aimed to make nearly every excerpt long enough to spend some time wrestling with, but short enough to read in a sitting. This principle determined the number of texts we could include as being roughly thirty. So, which thirty texts?

Our next principle was to be sure to offer both sides of the argument, Protestant and Catholic. We make no claims to false objectivity; this edition has been prepared by Protestants chiefly for the education and edification of Protestants, although we hope that Catholics and non-religious readers may profit richly from it as well. The majority of texts selected come from the pens of Protestant writers, but pre-Reformation reforming Catholics and fierce opponents of the Reformation are represented as well. In particular, we thought it essential to include the chief formal repudiations of the Reformation by the Roman Church—Leo X's bull of excommunication, and key sessions of the Council of Trent—as

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well as critiques penned by Rome's most capable 16<sup>th</sup>-century polemicists: Thomas Cajetan, Thomas More, and Robert Bellarmine. We also thought it essential to include an example of the Counter-Reformation spirituality that proved so successful in winning many souls back to the obedience of Rome—Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.

Our third principle was to be sure to present the Reformation not as some bolt from the blue, but as the culmination of late medieval conflicts and reforming efforts. These took many different forms, from largely political conflicts (though with massive ecclesiological implications) between prince and pope, to scholastic debates over transubstantiation, to humanist critiques of the moral corruption of the church and the papacy. It seemed appropriate to reach more than two centuries back to the high-water mark of papal arrogance, the pontificate of Benedict VIII, and the first rumblings of dissent that his claims provoked. Marsilius of Padua's radical ecclesiological ideas were an obvious forerunner of the Reformation, as were the controversial reforming efforts of Wycliffe in Oxford and Hus in Prague. Finally, Erasmus's scathing satire *Julius Exclusus* offers a clear picture of why, by 1517, so many were ready to hear Luther's assault on the corruption of the papacy.

Our fourth principle was to be sure to present selections from all those Protestant Reformers recognized at the time as the most brilliant and influential, or at least as many of them as possible. Accordingly, Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon, the chief architects of the Lutheran tradition, John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, and Peter Martyr Vermigli, the leading spokesmen for continental Reformed theology, and Thomas Cranmer and Richard Hooker, the chief theologians of the early Church of England, are all featured here. Unfortunately omitted for the sake of space (given the necessity of particularly spotlighting the crucial works of Luther) are Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Bucer, who played crucial roles in beginning the reformations at Zurich and Strasbourg, respectively.

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Fifth, although our chief purpose was to present the theology of the magisterial Reformation, we wanted to also give at least some indication of the internal conflicts generated by the Protestant movement, in the emergence of radical movements like those of the Anabaptists in Switzerland and the Puritans in England. Both movements combined an extreme form of the Protestant commitment to *sola Scriptura* with a powerful zeal to purge the church of lukewarm believers and remaining papal corruptions. For the Anabaptist *Schleitheim Confession*, this meant a stark separation of church from world and political authority. For the Puritan *Admonition to Parliament*, it meant a stark contrast between pure church and corrupt church and a demand that political authorities complete the unfinished business of reformation.

Sixth, although wanting to center readers' attention on the crucial events and texts of the early decades of the Reformation, we did not want to give the impression that the Reformation was somehow finished by the time its leading architects died in the 1540s-1560s. On the contrary, many historians have seen the Reformation (or the Reformations, plural) as an ongoing process that continued at least until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, or perhaps beyond. We have not sought to extend our reader that far, but we have attempted to give some sense of the continuing refinement of Protestant theology in the course of conflict against internal dissent and external critiques from the 1570s up through the crucial Synod of Dordt in 1618.

Seventh and finally, given the need to include such a wide range of texts, we faced the challenge of how to maintain at least some coherence and sense of common threads through the volume. Accordingly, we abandoned any pretensions toward providing examples of the full array of theological and liturgical debates that proliferated in the Reformation period. Luther's original narrow protest against indulgences soon opened up into a broad theological war fought on many fronts, with individual salvation, the sacraments, the authority of church ministers, the role of political authority, the authority and interpretation of Scripture, the role of

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Mary and the saints, the value of church festivals and ceremonies, the role of philosophy in theology, and much more becoming sharply contested terrain. In an effort to render this Reader manageable, we have deliberately chosen to highlight only certain doctrinal flashpoints, those which we believe to have stood near the very heart of Reformation conflicts. Chief among these are the doctrine of the church, and its relation to the state (highlighted in the readings from Boniface, Marsilius, Hus, the Council of Constance, Luther's *Letter to the German Nobility*, the Schleithem Articles, Bullinger, and Chemnitz), the doctrine of the Eucharist, and transubstantiation in particular (highlighted in the readings from Wycliffe, Luther's *Babylonian Captivity*, Cajetan, the Council of Trent's 13<sup>th</sup> Session, Vermigli, and the Book of Common Prayer), the doctrine of justification *sola fide* and related issues (highlighted in Luther's *Freedom of a Christian*, Melancthon, the Council of Trent's 6<sup>th</sup> Session, Ignatius of Loyola, Ursinus, and the Canons of Dordt), and the meaning of the Protestant commitment to *sola Scriptura* (highlighted in the readings from More, the *Admonition to Parliament*, Hooker, Bellarmine, and Whitaker). Indeed, the only readings that do not neatly fit with these four themes amply justify their inclusion on other grounds: Erasmus's *Julius Exclusus* highlights the moral corruption of the Renaissance Papacy, the *Ninety-Five Theses* and the bull *Exsurge Domine* focus attention on the controversy over indulgences that originally kicked off the Reformation, the excerpt from Calvin's *Institutes* spotlights an oft-neglected and misrepresented aspect of Protestant theology, showing that neither total depravity nor *sola Scriptura* were meant to deny the reality of God's self-revelation through nature, and the excerpt from *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* reminds us of the high drama and life-or-death stakes of the Reformation for many of its leading actors.

### **Editorial Objectives**

So much for our principles of selection with these texts. Beyond choosing the most appropriate and accessible excerpts, we

have tried to keep our editorial intrusion as minimal as possible. In his memorable essay, “On Reading Old Books,” C.S. Lewis remarks that:

The student is half afraid to meet one of the great philosophers face to face. He feels himself inadequate and thinks he will not understand him. But if he only knew, the great man, just because of his greatness, is much more intelligible than his modern commentator. The simplest student will be able to understand, if not all, yet a very great deal of what Plato said; but hardly anyone can understand some modern books on Platonism. It has always therefore been one of my main endeavours as a teacher to persuade the young that firsthand knowledge is not only more worth acquiring than secondhand knowledge, but is usually much easier and more delightful to acquire.<sup>2</sup>

The same goes, we are convinced, for the great Reformers. There are, to be sure, plenty of arcane debates, abstruse distinctions, and tedious polemics to be found in the vast outpouring of theological literature in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, the chief points of debate are by no means as difficult to understand as most imagine, and they speak to perennial questions of church organization and religious experience that are still very much with us today. Accordingly, in this edition of our Reformation Reader, aimed chiefly at an undergraduate (or equivalent) audience, we have sought to allow the voices from the past to speak, as much as possible, without interruption or unnecessary interpretation. There will be, to be sure, citations and allusions that are lost on the modern reader, or difficult theological terms or contextual clues that escape his understanding, but in none of these texts, we believe, are these so widespread or crucial as to significantly impair understanding. We have thus adopted a policy of largely refraining from adding anno-

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<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, “On the Reading of Old Books,” in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 200.



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tations in most cases, with two chief exceptions: first, we have filled in and filled out Scripture references where they were lacking; second, chiefly in the early English texts, we have supplied glosses of unfamiliar terms in the footnotes (in the format: <sup>2</sup> *hap*: chance or fortune). Besides these and the initial footnote at the beginning of each selection specifying the source, other annotations, whether in footnotes or in brackets, are taken over from our source editions unless specified otherwise, and are generally pretty minimal.

Once the reader embarks on his journey through any one of these primary sources, we wanted him to be distracted as little as possible, grappling instead face-to-face with the thoughts of the great minds of the past. The main thing the contemporary reader needs, we are convinced, is simple historical contextualization, a broad narrative tapestry on which to see the particular men, moments, and conflicts that gave rise to these texts. It is this that the introductions to each text chiefly aim to supply. Indeed, though these introductions are certainly no substitute for a good Reformation history,<sup>3</sup> alongside which this volume should ideally be read, we have sought to construct these introductions in such a way that, strung together, they do provide at least something of a coherent story of the Reformation. In them you will find brief biographies of the key actors on this tempestuous historical stage, but more importantly, biographies of the concepts and convictions around which they struggled, and which drove them to extraordinary, heroic, and sometimes terrible deeds. At the end of each, you will also find a short list of recommended texts for further reading on the history and the topic.

As you immerse yourself in this story five centuries on, we hope that you will not merely grow in understanding of what drove these men to do the things they did, but that you too will be inspired to extraordinary deeds on behalf of the church of our day, a church desperately in need of fresh reformation.

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<sup>3</sup> The best, for all its flaws, probably being Diarmaid MacCulloch's *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

## ABOUT THIS EDITION

THE STORY behind this particular volume is something of an odd one. My friend Jonathan Roberts, back before he was really my friend and when he was just some guy on the internet who bombarded me with messages about things that the Davenant Institute (then the Davenant Trust) ought to do, sent me an email out of the blue declaring that we needed to put together and publish a Reformation Reader in time for the Reformation 500 anniversary. It sounded like a worthy but exhausting undertaking, and so I dutifully put it on my list of Future Projects to Consider, and over the next year and a half or so put Jonathan off with vague excuses or reassurances (depending on my mood) whenever he mentioned it again.

Then in January of this year, 2017, my friend Daniel Foucahon approached me about editing the fourth volume of the Old Western Culture reader series that his curriculum company, Roman Roads Media, was producing. Entitled *The Reformation*, it was slated to include a selection of key theological writings from the period leading up to and encompassing the Reformation, though as a Great Books reader, it also included extended selections from Chaucer and Spenser. We agreed that I would identify selections and write introductions for his volume if Davenant could subsequently reproduce this material, subtracting the Chaucer and Spenser, and adding a number of additional texts, for the Reformation Reader that Jonathan had so long lobbied.

I worked closely with Daniel and his assistant Andrea Pliego in identifying nineteen texts (twenty-one if you count the two Boniface VIII and Council of Constance excerpts separately) that to-

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gether provided a good representative survey of the key theological conflicts that led to and played out in the Protestant Reformation. We chopped them down to manageable 10-30 page excerpts (in most cases), and I researched and wrote short historical and thematic introductions for each of them. Subsequently, Jonathan and I undertook to find roughly ten more authors and texts that would fill out the Davenant edition of the reader with more theological breadth, historical depth, and a fuller representation of Catholic opponents of the Reformation particularly. I researched and wrote the introductions for most of the new material, while Jonathan covered his two favorites, Whitaker and Bellarmine. My assistant Brian Marr put in countless and invaluable hours in scanning, formatting, and editing, and somehow or other we have squeezed the thing out just in time for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, October 31, 2017. Note that there will be a few subtle differences between our edition and the Roman Roads edition even where the content overlaps, as we made a few emendations later in the editorial process.

Given our tight timeline and limited resources, we make no pretensions to have produced the best possible reader of Reformation theology. We limited ourselves to texts already available in English translation, for one thing, which left many true gems of Reformation and counter-Reformation literature off the table. To be sure, most of the most significant works have already been translated, but we do cherish aspirations of a future edition of this textbook that might include a few excerpts never before translated into English. We also recognize that in many cases, existing translations leave much room for improvement. For the present edition, we have accepted them as they are, aside from cleaning up formatting and where necessary silently correcting obvious typographical errors, but again this is something that might be revisited in subsequent editions. Most of the selections we use are taken from older editions now in the public domain, though where there were strong reasons to use a more recent text, we procured the necessary permissions or else kept our excerpts within the bounds of Fair Use standards.

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We also recognize that for readers interested in digging deeper, there are some important bells and whistles lacking in the present edition, such as annotations providing citations of sources referenced in the texts, and a comprehensive index. If the present Student Edition be well-received, our aim is to produce within a year or so a Scholars' Edition that includes such additional features.

Given our desire to build on what we have begun here and to make this work as truthful, faithful, and useful as possible, we invite corrections and suggested improvements from all our readers (be they as small as a typo or as large as suggesting a different text selection that might profitably be substituted). If you desire to submit such a suggestion or correction, please email it to [secretary@davenantinstitute.org](mailto:secretary@davenantinstitute.org) and we will take it under consideration for inclusion in the next revised edition. In the meantime, may this volume be a rich blessing to the church!

Bradford Littlejohn, *editor*

# INTRODUCTION TO BONIFACE VIII'S *CLERICOS LAICOS AND UNAM SANCTAM*

THE simultaneously tragic and comic saga of conflicts between princes and popes that dominated the later Middle Ages reached its climax—and its low point—in the ugly high-stakes brawl between Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294-1303) and King Philip IV of France (r. 1285-1314) from 1296-1303. The episode reflected badly on all parties, and ended ignominiously for Pope Boniface himself, but not before producing an enduring statement of some of the most extreme pretensions of the medieval Catholic Church.

There was, of course, no neat distinction between church and state in the Middle Ages in the modern sense—after all, every member of Western European society was in theory a Christian. But there was a sharp distinction between clergy and laity, and with it, a series of escalating conflicts about just how much power each party had. On the one hand, the Church had succeeded in establishing the clergy as a virtually autonomous state-within-a-state in each of Western Europe's kingdoms: they were immune from taxes, from civil courts, and from many laws, ultimately answerable to the Pope alone. As rising royal powers sought to contest this autonomy (after all, the Church's estates were often fabulously rich, and their tax immunity took a huge bite out of royal revenues), the popes for their part often went even further, claiming not merely sole authority over the clergy, but an indirect authority over lay rulers as well. Christ had given Peter “two swords” (Lk. 22:38) which referred to the sword of spiritual authority *and* that of tem-

poral authority. To be sure, the Pope normally delegated the latter to kings and princes, but he could in principle intervene directly in civil affairs or even depose rulers when he saw fit. If he had seen fit only for holy and spiritual reasons, things might not have been so bad, but many popes of this period were as worldly and ambitious as their royal rivals.

Boniface VIII, although apparently sincere in his commitment to the theological principles which undergirded his sometimes extraordinary claims, was not a particularly likable character. Scholar Brian Tierney describes him as “an arrogant, very able ruler, impatient of opposition, given to hot outbursts of rage” and his rival, Philip IV, as “a man of cold ambition.”<sup>1</sup> Their particular dispute, though rooted in the long-simmering conflicts described above, emerged out of one of France’s regular wars with England. Both parties, desperate to fund their “just war” against one another, resorted to taxing the clergy within their realms, in violation of papal decrees. Although neither party responded particularly well when Boniface tried to bring them to heel, Philip proved more brazenly defiant than his English counterpart, Edward Longshanks.

When Boniface issued the bull *Clericis Laicos* in 1296, threatening Philip and his courtiers with excommunication if they continued to tax the Church, Philip duly forbade the export of any currency from France. Since the Papacy itself had no compunction about levying a heavy tax on French churchmen to finance its own expenditures, Philip had deftly succeeded in driving Boniface to the brink of bankruptcy. Boniface soon capitulated, issuing another bull which, while not retracting *Clericis Laicos* directly, sullenly conceded that if a king deemed there to be a national emergency, he could tax the clergy without consulting the Pope.

Gaining confidence after this easy victory, Philip provoked another round of conflict in 1301 by arresting and trying a French bishop for heresy and blasphemy. Clergy, of course, were only

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 172.

supposed to be tried by other clergy, so Boniface summoned his advisors and released another bull, *Ausculta Fili*, which condescendingly reprimanded Philip and reminded him that he was subject to Boniface's authority. Boniface did not say in exactly what sense he meant this, but Philip and his advisors took it as the Pope's claim to be feudal overlord over the kingdom of France. They had little difficulty in rallying most of the nation, including even many French clergy, against the Pope.

In response, Boniface issued the justly famous bull *Unam Sanctam*, which is widely considered the starkest and strongest official statement of papal authority ever produced. In it, Boniface put forth two sets of claims, insisting on a plenitude of power in all spiritual matters and temporal matters alike. Under the former heading, he declared that "it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff." Under the latter, he confidently asserted the "two swords" theory in which the material sword was administered "by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest," so that "temporal authority [is] subjected to spiritual power." None of the arguments that he cobbled together for the purpose were new as such, but nowhere else had they all been brought together in one place for the purpose of making such sweeping claims (nowhere, at least, except in the treatise *On Ecclesiastical Power*, penned a few months earlier by *Unam Sanctam's* ghost-writer, Giles of Rome).

Philip responded by raiding the papal palace, having Boniface beaten by thugs, and then, when he died soon afterward, posthumously condemned in a mock trial convened by a puppet pope, his successor, Clement V (r. 1305-1314). Thus, the full temporal claims of the document were soon rendered a dead letter, but they have never been retracted by the Catholic Church, and the spiritual claims continued to be broadly accepted in the centuries that follow. The document thus remains an eloquent statement of the highly institutional and authoritarian ecclesiology that the Protestant Reformers set out to repair.

### **Further Reading**

For further reading, see Stephen K. Ozment, *The Age of Reform* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), chapter 4; Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).



## BONIFACE VIII, *CLERICOS LAICOS* (1296)<sup>1</sup>

BISHOP Boniface, servant of the servants of God, in perpetual memory of this matter. Antiquity teaches us that laymen are in a high degree hostile to the clergy, a fact which is also made clear by the experiences of the present times; in as much as, not content within their own bounds, they strive after what is forbidden and loose the reins in pursuit of what is unlawful. Nor have they the prudence to consider that all jurisdiction is denied to them over the clergy—over both the persons and goods of ecclesiastics. On the prelates of the churches and on ecclesiastical persons, monastic and secular, they impose heavy burdens, tax them and declare levies upon them. They exact and extort from them the half, the tenth or twentieth or some other portion or quota of their revenues or of their goods; and they attempt in many ways to subject them to slavery and reduce them to their goods; and they attempt in many ways to subject them to slavery and reduce them to their sway. And with grief do we mention it, some prelates of the churches and ecclesiastical persons, fearing where they ought not to fear, seeking a transitory peace, dreading more to offend the temporal than the eternal majesty, without obtaining the authority or permission of the Apostolic chair, do acquiesce, not so much rashly as improvidently, in the abuses of such persons. We, therefore, wishing to put

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<sup>1</sup> From Rymer's *Foedera*, Vol. 1., Pt. II, ed. A. Clarke and F. Holbrooke (London: G. Eyre and A. Strahan, 1816), 836. Translated in Ernest F. Henderson, *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages* (London: George Bell, 1910), 432-434.

a stop to such iniquitous acts, by the counsel of our brothers, of the apostolic authority, have decreed: that whatever prelates, or ecclesiastical persons, monastic or secular, of whatever grade, condition or standing, shall pay, or promise, or agree to pay as levies or talliages to laymen the tenth, twentieth or hundredth part of their own and their churches' revenues or goods—or any other quantity, portion or quota of those same revenues or goods, of their estimated or of their real value—under the name of an aid, loan, subvention, subsidy or gift, or under any other name, manner or clever pretense, without the authority of that same chair [shall incur the sentence of excommunication]<sup>2</sup>.

Likewise emperors, kings, or princes, dukes, counts or barons, podestas, captains or officials or rectors—by whatever name they are called, whether of cities, castles, or any places whatever, wherever situated; and any other persons, of whatever pre-eminence, condition or standing who shall impose, exact or receive such payments, or shall any where arrest, seize or presume to take possession of the belongings of churches or ecclesiastical persons which are deposited in the sacred buildings, or shall order them to be arrested, seized or taken possession of, or shall receive them when taken possession of, seized or arrested—also all who shall knowingly give aid, counsel or favour in the aforesaid things, whether publicly or secretly—shall incur, by the act itself, the sentence of excommunication. Corporations, moreover, which shall be guilty in these matters, we place under the ecclesiastical interdict.

The prelates and above-mentioned ecclesiastical persons we strictly command, by virtue of their obedience and under penalty of deposition, that they by no means acquiesce in such demands, without express permission of the aforesaid chair; and that they pay nothing under pretext of any obligation, promise and confession made hitherto, or to be made hereafter before such constitution, notice or decree shall come to their notice; nor shall the aforesaid

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<sup>2</sup> Here we have added brackets to clarify an ambiguity in the source text.—Davenant eds.

secular persons in any way receive anything. And if they shall pay, or if the aforesaid persons shall receive, they shall be, by the act itself, under sentence of excommunication. From the aforesaid sentences of excommunication and interdict, moreover, no one shall be able to be absolved, except in the throes of death, without the authority and special permission of the apostolic chair; since it is our intention by no means to pass over with dissimulation so horrid an abuse of the secular powers. Notwithstanding any privileges whatever—under whatever tenor, form, or manner or conception of words that have been granted to emperors, kings, and other persons mentioned above; as to which privileges we will that, against what we have here laid down, they in no wise avail any person or persons. Let no man at all, then, infringe this page of our constitution, prohibition or decree, or, with rash daring, act counter to it; but if any one shall presume to act, he shall know that he is about to incur the indignation of Almighty God and of His blessed apostles Peter and Paul.

*Given at Rome at St. Peter's on the sixth day before the Calends of March (Feb 25), in the second year of our pontificate.*

## **BONIFACE VIII, *UNAM SANCTAM* (1302)<sup>1</sup>**

URGED by faith, we are obliged to believe and to maintain that the Church is one, holy, catholic, and also apostolic. We believe in her firmly and we confess with simplicity that outside of her there is neither salvation nor the remission of sins, as the Spouse in the Canticles [Sgs. 6:8] proclaims: “One is my dove, my perfect one. She is the only one, the chosen of her who bore her,” and she represents one sole mystical body whose Head is Christ and the head of Christ is God [1 Cor. 11:3]. In her then is one Lord, one faith, one baptism [Eph. 4:5]. There had been at the time of the deluge only one ark of Noah, prefiguring the one Church, which ark, having been finished to a single cubit, had only one pilot and guide, i.e., Noah, and we read that, outside of this ark, all that subsisted on the earth was destroyed.

We venerate this Church as one, the Lord having said by the mouth of the prophet: “Deliver, O God, my soul from the sword and my only one from the hand of the dog” [Ps. 21:20]. He has prayed for his soul, that is for himself, heart and body; and this body, that is to say, the Church, He has called one because of the unity of the Spouse, of the faith, of the sacraments, and of the charity of the Church. This is the tunic of the Lord, the seamless tunic, which was not rent but which was cast by lot [Jn. 19:23–24]. Therefore, of the one and only Church there is one body and one

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Mary Mildred Curley in “The Conflict Between Pope Boniface VIII and Philip IV, the Fair” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1927).

head, not two heads like a monster; that is, Christ and the Vicar of Christ, Peter and the successor of Peter, since the Lord speaking to Peter Himself said: “Feed my sheep” [Jn. 21:17], meaning, my sheep in general, not these, nor those in particular, whence we understand that He entrusted all to him [Peter]. Therefore, if the Greeks or others should say that they are not confided to Peter and to his successors, they must confess not being the sheep of Christ, since Our Lord says in John “there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.” We are informed by the texts of the gospels that in this Church and in its power are two swords; namely, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the Apostles say: “Behold, here are two swords” [Lk. 22:38] that is to say, in the Church, since the Apostles were speaking, the Lord did not reply that there were too many, but sufficient. Certainly, the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: “Put up thy sword into thy scabbard” [Mt. 26:52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword, but the former is to be administered for the Church but the latter by the Church; the former in the hands of the priest; the latter by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest.

However, one sword ought to be subordinated to the other and temporal authority, subjected to spiritual power. For since the Apostle said: “There is no power except from God and the things that are, are ordained of God” [Rom. 13:1–2], but they would not be ordained if one sword were not subordinated to the other and if the inferior one, as it were, were not led upwards by the other.

For, according to the Blessed Dionysius, it is a law of the divinity that the lowest things reach the highest place by intermediaries. Then, according to the order of the universe, all things are not led back to order equally and immediately, but the lowest by the intermediary, and the inferior by the superior. Hence we must recognize the more clearly that spiritual power surpasses in dignity and in nobility any temporal power whatever, as spiritual things surpass the temporal. This we see very clearly also by the payment, bene-

diction, and consecration of the tithes, but the acceptance of power itself and by the government even of things. For with truth as our witness, it belongs to spiritual power to establish the terrestrial power and to pass judgement if it has not been good. Thus is accomplished the prophecy of Jeremias concerning the Church and the ecclesiastical power: “Behold today I have placed you over nations, and over kingdoms” and the rest [Jer. 1:10]. Therefore, if the terrestrial power err, it will be judged by the spiritual power; but if a minor spiritual power err, it will be judged by a superior spiritual power; but if the highest power of all err, it can be judged only by God, and not by man, according to the testimony of the Apostle: “The spiritual man judgeth of all things and he himself is judged by no man” [1 Cor. 2:15]. This authority, however, (though it has been given to man and is exercised by man), is not human but rather divine, granted to Peter by a divine word and reaffirmed to him [Peter] and his successors by the One Whom Peter confessed, the Lord saying to Peter himself, “Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in Heaven” etc., [Mt. 16:19]. Therefore, whoever resists this power thus ordained by God, resists the ordinance of God [Rom. 13:2], unless he invent like Manicheus two beginnings, which is false and judged by us heretical, since according to the testimony of Moses, it is not in the beginnings but in the beginning that God created heaven and earth [Gen. 1:1]. Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.



## INTRODUCTION TO JOHN HUS'S *ON THE CHURCH*

IF JOHN Wycliffe anticipated many of Luther's reforms from a purely theological perspective, it was left to his Czech disciple John (or Jan, in Czech spelling) Hus (c. 1369-1415) to provoke the political and ecclesiastical showdown which illustrated just how difficult meaningful church reform would be. Whereas Wycliffe died in his bed in his sixties, Hus was to die a martyr's death in his early forties, consigned to the flames by the Council of Constance in 1415. The irony of his fate is that Hus was not nearly so theologically radical as Wycliffe; indeed, interpreters have long sharply debated just how much a disciple of Wycliffe he was or wasn't, with some arguing for complete dependence and others insisting that he was careful to distance himself from Wycliffe's errors and was simply misunderstood by a paranoid church bureaucracy. The truth, as it usually does, seems to lie somewhere between these extremes.

Hus was concerned, as Wycliffe was, for the practical reform of the church, riddled as it was with greed and superstition, and for the preaching of the Scriptures (and indeed, he played a part in producing a Czech translation of the Bible). He did not, though, follow Wycliffe in his more radical positions, such as his denunciation of the Pope as Antichrist or, most significantly, his rejection of transubstantiation. Still, and crucially, he did come to oppose the sale of indulgences, and like Wycliffe, the whole ecclesiology that lay behind them. But before examining his ecclesiology and his treatise *De Ecclesia*, it may be good to explain how the theology of Wycliffe ended up in far-off Bohemia (as the modern-day Czech



Republic was then called), as well as the series of events that brought Hus to prominence and then to the stake.

Wycliffe's influence in Bohemia was the unintended by-product of the marriage between King Richard II of England and Anne of Bohemia in 1382, after which a steady stream of Bohemian scholars was brought over to study at Oxford, where the influence of Wycliffe's disciples and writings remained strong until the end of the century. Initially, it was only Wycliffe's philosophical writings that made it to the University of Prague, where they made a strong impression and gained for Wycliffe a loyal following, apparently unaware of (or unconcerned about) the "heresy" of his other works. John Hus, who had begun teaching in the University toward the end of the 1390s, was one of these early followers. By 1403, it appears, many of Wycliffe's theological writings, including some that had been denounced in England as heretical, had made their appearance in Prague, provoking a condemnation by the Archbishop of forty-five supposedly heretical Wycliffite teachings. Despite this condemnation, several members of the University, including Hus (by then a prominent preacher in the city) defended some of the teachings, recognizing in them themes that resonated with those of recent Bohemian reform movements. Still, few sought to endorse the whole of Wycliffe's reforming program.

The slow-simmering quarrel between defenders and opponents of Wycliffe might never have gone much further except for a series of events set in motion in 1409. That year, the Council of Pisa convened to try to end the Great Schism, deposing the two rival claimants to the papacy, Benedict XIII and Gregory XII, and electing in their place Alexander V (soon succeeded by John XXIII). As neither of the former claimants stepped down, there were now *three* rival popes, each supported by some rulers in Christendom. At the University of Prague, conflict raged between the Bohemian faculty, who followed the lead of their King Vaclav IV (r. 1363-1419) in endorsing Alexander V, whereas the Germans and Poles at the University supported Gregory. Vaclav responded by re-organizing the University to give the Bohemian faculty three

votes and the other nations only one, to which the latter responded by leaving en masse. For the new, now exclusively Czech university, Vaclav appointed John Hus as rector. Thus thrown into prominence, Hus found his Wycliffite leanings the objects of intense scrutiny and suspicion, and his opponents on the faculty made common cause with Archbishop Zbynek against him. By 1411, Huss had been excommunicated, although Vaclav vigorously opposed what he saw as the meddling of the church authorities, and pressured the Archbishop into backing down. When Zbynek suddenly died in late 1411 and was replaced with a weak and ineffective successor, it looked like Hus might be left alone after all. That year, however, Pope John XXIII, Alexander's successor, authorized the preaching of indulgences to raise funds for a "holy crusade" against King Ladislaus of Naples, a supporter of his arch-rival, Pope Gregory XII. Hus and many in Prague were appalled at this shameless exploitation of the spiritual state of the common people to fund an unholy war between the popes, and fiercely opposed the indulgence preachers.

When Hus took up his pen to denounce the indulgences, he sealed his fate. In 1412, not only was Hus excommunicated anew, but all of Prague was placed under interdict (a suspension of all the sacraments on which salvation depended) until they handed him over. His fate was delayed for three years by the weakness and internal division of the ecclesiastical forces arrayed against him and the fitful support of King Vaclav IV and other powerful allies. But in 1415 he was summoned to answer for his heresies at the Council of Constance, which, having deposed all three rival popes, was now the supreme ecclesiastical authority. Despite a promise of safe-conduct, he was tried for heresy, quickly condemned, and burned at the stake.

It is devilishly difficult to sort out which "heresies" Hus might actually have been guilty of and which were false accusations, but much of the Council's ire was directed against the arguments so forcefully summarized in Hus's *De Ecclesia*, composed in the midst of controversy in 1413. Drawing heavily on the writings of

St. Augustine and on Wycliffe's book by the same name (not to mention extensive and careful arguments from Scripture), Hus's *On the Church* was a revolutionary document and, perhaps more than even he realized, a frontal assault on the late medieval Roman Catholic system. In it, he argued that, properly speaking, the church is not an institutional organization or the body of the clergy, but the whole body of the elect united to Christ their mystical head. As such, the true church is invisible, and the church that we see in history is a mixed multitude, consisting of true followers of Christ and those destined for perdition. This redefinition of the church along spiritual lines meant that not only were the papacy and the priesthood demoted to secondary importance, but their authority was in fact radically challenged. There was no guarantee that a priest or even a pope was among the elect, and in fact, if the pope acted wickedly or commanded against the law of God, he probably was not. In such cases, his claims to authority were null and void, and indeed believers were obliged to disobey. Only insofar as the priest or pope commanded in line with the truth of Christ did he truly represent the authority of Christ. Thus, as Hus says in his masterful treatment of the power of the keys, excerpted below, "it is clear that no man may be loosed from sin or receive the remission of sins, unless God have loosed him or given him remission," no matter what the priest says. By assigning the highest power claimed by the Church—the power over sins and salvation—to Christ alone, Hus challenged the entire ecclesiastical edifice down to its foundations, though it would be another century before it began to crack.

### Further Reading

For further reading, see David S. Schaff, *John Huss: His Life, Teachings, and Death, After Five Hundred Years* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915); Thomas A. Fudge, *Jan Hus: Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010); František Šmahel and Ota Pavlíček, eds., *A Companion to Jan Hus* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

# JOHN HUS, ON THE CHURCH (1413)<sup>1</sup>

## Chapter 1: On the Unity of the Church

AS EVERY earthly pilgrim ought faithfully to believe the holy catholic church just as he ought to love Jesus Christ, the Lord, the bridegroom of that church, and also the church herself, his bride; but as he does not love this, his spiritual mother, except he also know her by faith, therefore ought he to learn to know her by faith, and thus to honor her as his chief mother.

Therefore, in order to reach a proper knowledge of her, it is to be noted (1) that the church signifies the house of God, constituted for the very purpose that in it the people may worship its God, as it is written: "Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" (1 Cor. 2:22). Or, to speak with Augustine: "Do you despise the church of God, the house of prayer?" (2) The church signifies the ministers belonging to the house of God. Thus the clerics belonging to one material church call themselves the church. But according to the Greeks, a church is a congregation held to gather under one rule, as Aristotle teaches when he says: "All have part in the church" (*Politics* 2:7). In view of this meaning, therefore, the congregation of all men is called the church. This appears in Matt. 25:31-33, which says: "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all his angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory and before him shall be congregated all nations." What a

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from David Schaff, trans., *De Ecclesia: The Church by John Huss* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915).

great congregation of all men under the rule of Christ the king that will be! Because, however, the whole of that congregation is not the holy church it is added, “and he will separate them, the one from the other, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

From this it is evident that there is one church of the sheep and another of the goats, one church of the righteous and another of the reprobate. Likewise, the church of the righteous is on the one hand catholic, that is, universal, which is not a part of anything else. Of this I am now treating. On the other hand, it is particular, a part with other parts, as the Savior said: “Where two or three are congregated together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). From this it follows that two righteous persons congregated together in Christ’s name constitute, with Christ as the head, a particular holy church, and likewise three or four and so on to the whole number of the predestinate without admixture. In this sense the term church is often used in Scripture, as when the apostle says: “To the church which is in Corinth, to the sanctified in Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:1). Likewise Acts 20:28: “Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church which he hath purchased with his own blood.” And in this sense, all the righteous now living under Christ’s rule in the city of Prague, and more particularly the predestinate, are the holy church of Prague, and the same is true of other particular churches of saints of which Ecclesiasticus 24:2, speaks: “In the congregations of the Most High shall [wisdom] open her mouth,” and also 31:11: “All the congregation of the saints shall declare his alms.”

But the holy catholic—that is, universal—church is the totality of the predestinate or all the predestinate present, past, and future. This definition follows St. Augustine on John, who shows how it is that one and the same church of the predestinate, starting at the beginning of the world, runs on to the apostles, and thence to the day of judgment. For Augustine says: “The church which brought forth Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, also brought forth Moses, and at a later time the prophets before the Lord’s ad-

vent and she, which brought forth these, also brought forth the apostles and our martyrs and all good Christians. For she has brought forth all who have been born and lived at different periods, but they have all been comprised in a company of one people. And the citizens of this city have experienced the toils of this pilgrimage. Some are experiencing them now, and some will be experiencing them, even to the end of the world” (*C. Recur.* 32:4). How clearly that holy man shows what the holy catholic church is! And, in the same place and in a similar way, he speaks of the church of the wicked. This, he says, “brought forth Cain, Ham, Ishmael, and Esau, and also Dathan and other like persons of that people. And she, which brought forth these, also brought forth Judas, the false apostles, Simon Magus, and other pseudo-Christians, down to these days—all obstinately hardened in fleshly lusts, whether they are mixed together in a union or are clearly distinguished the one from the other.” So much, Augustine.

From this statement it appears that the holy universal church is one, the church which is the totality of the predestinate, including all, from the first righteous man to the last one to be saved in the future. And it includes all who are to be saved who make up the number, in respect to the filling up of which number all the saints slain under the altar had the divine assurance that they should wait for a time until the number should be filled up of their fellow servants and brethren (*Rev.* 6:9-11). For the omniscient God, who has given to all things their weight, measure, and number, has predetermined how many shall ultimately be saved. Therefore, the universal church is also Christ’s bride about whom the Canticles speak, and about whom Isaiah 61:10 [speaks]: “As a bridegroom decked with a crown, and as a bride adorned with jewels.” She is the one dove of which Christ said: “My dove is one, my excellent one” (*Song of Songs* 6:9). She is also the strong woman whose maidens are clothed with double garments (*Prov.* 21:2). She is the queen, of whom the Psalmist says: “The queen stands at thy right hand in vestments of gold” (*Psalms* 45:9). This is Jerusalem, our mother, the temple of the Lord, the kingdom of heaven and

the city of the Great King; and this whole church, as Augustine says, “is to be understood not only of that part which sojourns here, praising God from the rising to the setting of the sun, and which, after its old captivity, is singing the new song, but also of that part in heaven which, continuing true to the purpose for which it was constituted, has always been loyal to God, and has never felt misery from any fall. This part among the holy angels remains blessed and, as it behooves it to do, helps the part sojourning upon the earth, because she who is to be one by the companionship of eternity is now also one by the bond of love. And this whole church was constituted to worship God. Therefore, neither the whole nor any part of it wishes to be worshipped as God” (*Enchiridion*, 41). So far, Augustine.

This is the holy catholic church which Christians profess immediately after professing their faith in the Holy Spirit. First, because, as Augustine says, she is the highest creature, therefore she is placed immediately after the Trinity, which is uncreated, and second, because she is bound to Christ in a never-ending matrimony, and by the love of the Holy Spirit. And third, because, the Trinity being once acknowledged, it is proper that it should have her as a temple in which to dwell. Therefore Augustine, as above [*Enchiridion*, 41] concludes: “That God dwells in his temple—not only the Holy Spirit, but the Father likewise, and also the Son. And of his body—by virtue of which he is made head of the church of God which is among men, in order that in all things he might have the pre-eminence—the Son said: ‘Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it up again’” (John 2:21). From these words of Augustine we deduce (1) that the universal church is one, praising God from the beginning of the world to the end; (2) that the holy angels are a part of the holy catholic church; (3) that the part of the church called pilgrim or militant is helped by the church triumphant; (4) that the church triumphant and the church militant are bound together by the bond of love; (5) that the whole church and every part of it are to worship God, and that neither she nor any part of it wishes to be worshipped as God.

From all this the conclusion follows that the faithful ought not to believe in the church, for she is not God, but the house of God, as Augustine in his *Exposition of the Creed* says, but they should believe that the catholic church is the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ—bride, I say, chaste, incorrupt, and never capable of being corrupted. For St. Cyprian, the bishop and glorious martyr, says: “The church is one, which is spread abroad far and wide by the increase of her fruitfulness” (24:1, *C. Loquitur*). And he adds: “Nevertheless the head is one, the origin is one, and one is the copious mother of fruitfulness. The bride of Christ cannot be defiled. She is incorrupt and chaste. She knows one house and guards with chaste modesty the sanctity of one couch.” The holy church is also the husbandman’s vineyard, of which Gregory in his Homilies says: “Our Maker has a vineyard, namely the universal church, which starts from righteous Abel and goes down to the last elect person who shall be born in the end of the world, which bears as many saints as the vineyard sends forth branches.” Of the church St. Remigius also says in his *Homily Quadragesima* on the text: “The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it.’ The holy church is made up of two parts, those who have not sinned and those who have ceased to sin.” St. Isidore also, in speaking of the church, says: “The holy church is called catholic for the reason that it is universally distributed over all the world” (*de Summo Bono*, 14). Augustine and Ambrose likewise in their canticle, *Praising God*, say: “The holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee.” And Ambrose speaks thus of her: “What house is more worthy of the entrance of apostolic preaching than is the holy church? Or who else is to be preferred above all others than Christ, who was accustomed to wash the feet of his guests and did not suffer any whom he received into his house to dwell there with soiled steps, that is, works?” (24:1). And, speaking of this church, Pope Pelagius cites Augustine as saying, “There cannot be two churches,” and then adds: “Truly, as it has often been said, there can be only one church, the church which is Christ’s body, which cannot be divided into two or more bodies” (24:1, *C. Schis-*



ma). Jerome also says of the church: “The church of Christ has no spot or wrinkle or anything of that sort, but he who is a sinner or is soiled with any filth cannot be said to be of Christ’s church” (*de Pan., Dist. 1: C. Ecc.*). This holy universal church is Christ’s mystical body, as the apostle says, Eph. 1:22: “He gave himself to be the head over all the church, which is his body.” Again he said, “He is the head of the body, which is the church” (Col. 1:18) and again, “For his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col. 1:24) and “Christ is the head of the church and himself is the Savior of his body” (Eph. 5:23) and further on: “Christ loved the church and gave himself for it that he might sanctify it, washing it with the washing of water in the word of life that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or anything of that kind, but that it should be holy and without spot” (Eph. 5:25-27.)

Upon this text the holy doctors lean, as when Augustine says, “Christ is the head of the church, which is his body destined in the future to be with him in his kingdom and unending glory” (*de doctrina Christi*). Gregory says, “Because Christ and the church are one, the head and the body are one person” (*Moralia*, 35:9). And on Ezekiel, *homily 15*, he says: “The church is one substance with Christ, its head.” And Bernard on the Canticles, *homily 12*: “The church is Christ’s body, more dear than the body he gave over to death.” And Pas Paschasius says: “Even as it is found in the Scriptures—the church of Christ, or the bride of God, is truly called Christ’s body, truly because the general church of Christ is his body and Christ is called the head and all the elect are called members. From these members the one body of the church is brought unto a perfect man and the measure of the fulness of Christ. But the body of Christ, that is, the bride of God, is called in law the church. This is according to the apostle’s words: ‘And they twain shall be one flesh.’ This, he says, is a great sacrament in Christ and the church. For, if Christ and the church are one flesh, then certainly there is one body, one head, one bridegroom, but different elect persons, members the one of the other” (*de sacra, corporis Christi*). So far, Paschasius.



## Chapter X: The Power of Binding and Loosing

Now as to the power—authority—of Christ, given by himself to his vicars, which is touched upon in the words, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” that is, the power to bind and to loose sins—Augustine says, “The effects of this power are shown, when Christ adds, ‘And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ This power is a spiritual power. Therefore, it is to be noted, that spiritual power is a power of the spirit, determining its acts of itself so that a rational creature, so far as gracious gifts go, may be guided and have his own distinctive place both as determined from the standpoint of the subject and the object” (*Com. on John 21*). Every man, however, is a spirit, since he has two natures, as the Savior in speaking to his disciples said: “Ye know not what spirit ye are of” (Luke 9:55), and “every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God” (1 John 4:3). Here the spirit is subtle and heretical, denying Jesus to be very God and very man. And it is evident that whether power in respect to God and power in respect to rational creatures are analogous or the analogy is to be restricted to the powers of men and the powers of angels, it is true that all spiritual power is a power of the spirit. And, although a man does not give grace, he nevertheless administers the sacraments, so that the inferior is guided as to gifts of grace.

But although bodily power may be the result of gifts of grace, nevertheless it is immediate, so that the creature of God is ruled according to the law of natural things or of fortune. So every man is seen to have a double power, for every man ought to have the power over the movements of his members, and therefore has the power of walking in grace, so also the spiritual power has manifold subdivisions, for there is one power of orders and another common to all. The power of orders is called the spiritual power. This is that which the clergy has to administer the sacraments of the church that the clergy may profit itself and the laity, and such power is the power of consecrating the mass, absolving and per-

forming the other sacramental acts. For the power of consecrating the mass exists of itself and immediately, that the priest may consecrate just as dispositions of moral virtue are ordained because of acts better than the dispositions. And as the priest, in order that he may consecrate worthily, is guided as to the gifts of grace, the above description holds.

But the spiritual power, which is common, is the power which every priest has in doing spiritual works whether in his own person or among others, and about these the verse reminds us: "Teach, counsel, punish, console, remit, bear, pray."

For as many as received Christ by faith to these hath he given the power to become the sons of God, so that they may guide themselves and their brethren in the way of their Father Christ, and by rebuking in love as Christ said: "If thy brother sin against thee, go show him his fault between thee and him alone" (Matt. 18:15).

Secular power is twofold, civil and common. Civil power, which is authoritative, belongs only to the civil lord. But civil power, which is vicarious, belongs to officials or servants. But secular power, which is common to all, is the power by which a man is able to rule himself and his own according to the gifts of nature and of fortune. And thus, just as a man cannot be a whole man without body and soul, nor is the adopted child of God complete without the gifts of nature and of grace, so the pilgrim cannot get along as a pilgrim unless he has both secular and spiritual power which are common to all, although this is bound in the case of infants and the dead. But spiritual power is everywhere the more perfect and the sacerdotal power exceeds the power of kings in dignity as appears from Heb. 7:7: "Greater is he that blesses and less is he who is blest."

Hence the spiritual power, which is sacerdotal, excels the royal in age, dignity, and usefulness. In age it excels, because the priesthood was instituted by God's command, as appears from Ex. 28. Later at God's command the kingly power was instituted by the priesthood, as appears from Deut. 17 and 1 Sam. 12. In dignity it excels, as already said, because the priest as the greater blesses, con-

secrates, and anoints the king. And the usefulness is evidently greater for the reason that the spiritual power is in and of itself sufficient for the ruling of the people, as appears from the history of Israel, which down to the time of Saul was salubriously administered independent of the kingly authority. Therefore, the spiritual power, inasmuch as it concerns the best things—things having their sufficiency in themselves—excels the earthly power, since the latter is of no avail independent of the spiritual power which is the chief regulative force. On the other hand, the spiritual power may act by itself without the aid of the earthly power. And, for this reason, the priests who abuse this power, which is so exalted, by pride or other open sin, fall all the lower with the devil into hell, and this is in accord with the rule of St. Gregory and other saints: “The higher the position the deeper the fall.”

And it is to be noted, that power now means absolutely the ability to regulate and rule and now collectively such ability through authoritative notification and announcement. And when these senses are equally known, it is evident, there is nothing contradictory in the principles that there is no power but of God and yet to give power from God, that is, make an authoritative announcement before the church that a created being has from God power of this sort. Indeed, such a bestowal, so far as part of it is concerned, is given by man but not unless God primarily authorizes it. And from this we may further understand that power is not relaxed or stiffened, increased or diminished, so far as its essence goes, but only in respect to the exercise of the act which proceeds from the power itself. And this exercise ought only to be used when a reasonable ground exists for it from the side of God. This meaning is set forth in *Decretum 24:1, Miramur*, which says: “The official power is one thing, the exercise of it another. And official power is for the most part held in restraint in the case of monks and of others, such as those under suspension, who are inhibited from ministering, though the power itself is not taken away from them.” In like manner it is conceded that the natural power, which is free will, may now be relaxed by grace and now tightened [increased and less-

ened]. And in this way the seeming discordances of the doctors which arise by ambiguity of language are solved, some of whom, as Anselm, say, "that free will cannot be lost or increased or diminished," while others, like Augustine say that free will may be lost through sin and increased through grace (*Enchiridion*). On this account, there is in the church great strife about the power of bestowment, withdrawal, or restriction. Nevertheless, it is known that when God and reason make it necessary for the profit of the church that a thing should be done by man, then and not otherwise does God give or withdraw or restrict power of this sort.

Hence, when Christ said to Peter: "I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven," that is the power of binding and loosing sins, he said in the person of Peter to the whole church militant, that not does any person whatever of the church without distinction hold those keys, but that the whole church, as made up of its individual parts, as far as they are suitable for this, holds the keys. These keys, however, are not material things, but they are spiritual power and acquaintance with evangelical knowledge, and it was on account of this power and knowledge, as we believe, that Christ used the plural "keys." For this reason, the Master of Sentences [Peter Lombard] says: "He speaks in the plural 'keys,' for one is not sufficient. These keys are the wisdom of discernment and the power of judging, whereby the ecclesiastical judge is bound to receive the worthy and exclude the unworthy from the kingdom" (*12:18, cap. 2*). And it is to be noted that to the Trinity alone does it belong to have the chief power of this kind. And the humanity of Christ alone has chief subordinate power from within himself, for Christ is at the same time God and man. Nevertheless, prelates of the church have committed unto them instrumental or ministerial power, which is a judicial power, consisting chiefly of two things, namely, the power of knowing how to discriminate, and the power of judging judicially. The former of these is called in the court of penance the key of the conscience, reasonably disposing the mind to the exercise of the second function, that is, the judicial, for no one legally has the power of pronouncing a definite sentence

unless he has the prior power of discerning in a case in which he is called upon to discriminate and pronounce sentence.

The first key, therefore, is neither an act nor a state of knowledge, but the power of antecedent discernment. Consequently, all the power of the sacerdotal order, namely, of being the instrument in opening to man the gate, which is Christ, or of shutting to an inferior the said kingdom, is the key of the church given to Peter and to others, as appears from the Savior's words: "Verily I say unto you whatsoever ye bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). He also said: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins ye forgive they are forgiven unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained" (John 20:22). To Peter and the church in him were the words spoken: "Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth," etc. (Matt. 16:19).

These words, because of a defect in their understanding, frighten many Christians so that they are filled with servile fear, while others are deceived by them and presume because of the fullness of power [they are supposed to convey]. Therefore, the following things are to be laid down: (1) that the Savior's dictum about the virtue of the words is necessary, because it is not possible for a priest to loose or bind anything, unless such loosing and binding take place in heaven, not only in the heavenly realm which also comprises the sublunary world [world below the moon] and all things which are therein, but also take place with the divine approval and the approval of angelic beings which are heavenly. Hence, it is to be noted that guilt inheres in the soul of him who sins mortally and grace is corrupted or ceases to be, for which reason he who sins mortally is under the debt of eternal damnation, provided he does not do penance, and, if he persists in this guilt, he is separated from the companionship of pilgrims in grace. But in penance there is a remedy, by which guilt is deleted, grace conferred, the chain of damnation broken, and man reunited with the church. This penance is performed by contrition, confession and satisfaction. Contrition, which is sorrow or full pain for sin com-

mitted, must include displeasure with the sin already committed, and the sin which may be committed and, in the case of necessity, such contrition is enough for salvation. Hence the Savior, knowing that the mind of the adulteress was full of sorrow, added the words: "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). For this reason St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, and St. Gregory agree in saying that to be penitent is to lament evils done and not to wish to do evils that are to be lamented.

Secondly, it is to be noted that for the justification of the wicked man there is needed infinite power by which God cleanses from spot and stain and grants grace. Again, God's mercy is needed whereby he relaxes the offense done his Majesty, and the eternal punishment for the debt which would follow if he did not do penance. Therefore, the church often prays, "Almighty and most merciful God," urging the infinite power and mercy of God. But that infinite power is required for the justification of a wicked man is evident because, as Augustine says, "it is easier to create a world than to justify the wicked; the first demands infinite power and consequently also the second [act], and this is the reason why, in the justification of the wicked, the active bestowal of the Holy Spirit is required, which cannot be secured except from God," as Augustine proves in many places, as I have shown in my *Tract on Indulgences*. And the Master of Sentences concludes from these words of Augustine and says, "Therefore no men, however holy, can give the Holy Spirit" (1:14) and the same reasoning applies to the active remission of sins.

Hence in a unique sense the Baptist said of Christ: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). On these words Augustine says: "Let no one presume and say of himself that he takes away the sins of the world. Now, observe the proud against whom John lifted his finger were not yet heretics and yet they were already shown to be such against whom he cried from the river" (*Hom. on John, 4*). Wherefore the Jews often ascribed blasphemy to Christ because, esteeming him, though falsely, to be a mere man, they said he was not able of himself to forgive



sins, because sin is not forgiven by a mere word except only as the offense against God is relaxed. But who forgives an injury except the person against whom it is done or against whose subject it is done? For God, in giving power of this kind, first forgives the injury against Himself before His vicar can forgive. Hence on this point Ambrose says: "He alone forgives sins who alone died for us. The Word of God forgives sins. The priest is the judge. The priest performs his function and does not exercise the way of any power" (*De Penitentia*, 1). To the same purport speaks Jerome, whom the Master of Sentences quotes and Gregory (1:1, *Paulus*). The same holds good for the retention and binding of sins. Hence the Master of Sentences, adducing these authorities and reasons, concludes that "God alone washes a man within clean from the stain of sin and from the debt of eternal punishment," and he closes thus: "By these and many other testimonies it is taught that God alone and of Himself forgives sins; and just as He forgives some so He retains the sins of others" (4:18, 4).

But someone will say, if God alone can forgive and retain sins, why did He say to the apostles and their vicars: "Whatsoever ye shall loose," etc., and "whosoever sins ye retain," etc.? What, therefore, is it for a priest to loose or bind sins, to remit or retain? To the first the Master of Sentences gives answer and says: "Priests also bind when they impose the satisfaction of penance upon those who confess. They loose when in view of the satisfaction they forgive anything or admit those purged by it to participation in the sacraments." To the second Richard answers well in his *Power of Loosing and Binding*, when he says: "What is it to remit sins except to relax the sentence of punishment which is due for sins, and by relaxing to absolve? And what is it to retain sins but not to absolve those not truly penitent? For many of those who confess seek absolution who nevertheless do not want to wholly abandon their sins. Many promise caution for the future but do not want to make satisfaction. All of this sort, insofar as they do not truly repent, beyond doubt ought not to be forgiven. For truly to repent is to be sorry for past wrongdoing, to confess with a strong purpose, to

make satisfaction, and to take heed to oneself with all caution. Those who do penance in this way, they ought to be forgiven, and to be remitted in any other way without absolution, this is to retain sins. Now, from the things already said we may clearly understand that, in the forgiveness of sins, the Lord does by and of Himself what is done through his minister, that is, he does not by Himself and through the office of ministers, but He fully of Himself looses the bond of obduracy, and He looses by Himself and His minister the debt of eternal damnation; truly He looses by his ministers the debt of future purgation. The power of the first kind of forgiveness He reserves for Himself alone. The second kind of forgiveness He imparts by Himself and His minister. But the third kind, the Lord is accustomed to impart not as much by Himself as by his minister. Properly, indeed, is it said that the Lord absolves the truly penitent from the bond of damnation. Nonetheless it is true that the priest does this and the Lord, the Lord in view of the conversion of the heart, and the priest in view of the confession of the mouth. For the confession of the heart alone suffices in the case of the truly penitent unto salvation. And the case of necessity excludes both the confession of the mouth and absolution by the priest." Thus much Richard.

From these things the conclusion is drawn that God predestinates from eternity, and He executes in time the absolution of a person who is to be saved and the remission of his sin, before such a person is absolved on earth by the minister of the church. Again the minister of the church, the vicar of Christ, is not able to absolve or to bind, to forgive sins or to retain them, unless God has done this previously. This appears from John 15:5: "Apart from me ye can do nothing." That vessel of election knew this, and so he said: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5). Therefore, if we are not sufficient to think except as God imparts the thought, how are we sufficient to bind and loose except God have previously loosed and bound? And this the philosophers rec-

ognize when they say that a second cause can effect nothing without the coagency of a first cause.

Further, it is clear that no man may be loosed from sin or receive the remission of sins unless God have loosed him or given him remission. Hence the Baptist says: "A man can receive nothing except it first be given him from heaven" (John 3:27). Hence as an earthly lord first forgives in spirit the sin committed against himself, before this is announced by himself or by another, so it is necessary for God to do. Therefore, the presbyters are wildly beside themselves who think and say that they may of their own initiative loose and bind, without the absolution or binding of Jesus Christ preceding their act. For loosing and binding are in the first instance the simple [absolute] act of God. Therefore, the Gospel says, "Whatsoever is bound on earth shall be bound in heaven," but it does not say that it is bound in heaven at a later time and not previously.

Hence, the ignorant think that the priest binds and looses in time first and after him God. It is folly to have this opinion. But the logicians know well that priority is twofold: the one, priority of origin, taken from the material cause, and the other the priority of dignity, taken from the final cause. And these two priorities meet at one and the same time, and in this way the binding and loosing of the church militant is in a sense prior to the binding and loosing of the church triumphant and vice versa.

But God's act of binding or loosing is absolutely first. And it is evident it would be blasphemy to assert that a man may remit an offense done to so great a Lord, with the Lord himself approving the remission. For by the universal law and practice followed by the Lord, He himself must loose or bind first, if any vicar looses or binds. And for us no article of the faith ought to be more certain than the impossibility of any one of the church militant to absolve or bind except insofar as he is conformed to the head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hence, the faithful should be on his guard against this form of statement: "If the pope or any other pretends that he binds or

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looses by a particular sign, then by that very fact the offender is loosed or bound.” For by conceding this, they have to concede that the pope is impeccable as is God, for otherwise he is able to err and to misuse the key of Christ. And it is certain that as impossible as it is for the figure of a material key to open anything when the substance is wanting, so impossible is it for Christ’s vicar to open or shut except as he conforms himself to the key of Christ which first opens and shuts. For just as Christ the firstborn of many brethren and the firstfruits of them that sleep was the first to enter the kingdom, so he alone and above all could have had committed to him the spiritual kingdom which was altogether closed from the time our first parents lied until he himself came. And the same is to be said in regard to any opening or closing whatever which pertains to the heavenly country. And it is plain that every vicar of Christ, so long as he continues to walk in this world, may err, even in those things which concern the faith and the keys of the church as those knew who wrote the Chronicles [*Histories of the Church of Ranulph Higden, Martinus Polanus, etc*]; for Peter himself, Christ’s first vicar, sinned in these regards.

Likewise, God is the only being who cannot be ignorant as to whose sins may be remitted, and He the only being who cannot be moved by a wrong motive and judge unjust judgment. But any vicar may be ignorant as to whose sins ought to be remitted, and he may be moved by a wrong motive in binding or loosing. Therefore, if he refuse to impart absolution to one truly penitent and confessing, moved by anger or greed, he cannot by his act bind such a person in guilt. Similar would be the case with one who came with a lying confession, as happens very often, and the priest, not knowing his hypocrisy, should impart to him the words of absolution. Undoubtedly he does not thereby absolve, for the Scriptures say: “The Holy Spirit evades a feigned act of worship” (Wisdom 1:4). In the first case, just noted, the vicar alleges that he bound or forgave sins and did not; and in the second case he alleges that he loosed or remitted sins and did not. And it is evident how great the illusion may be of those who administer the keys and of those who do not

truly repent. For it is necessary that a person, wishing to be absolved, be first so disposed in his will that he is sorry for his guilt, and then have the purpose to sin no more. Hence, all priests combined—who are at the same time vicars—are not able to absolve from sins him who wishes to go on sinning and who does not wish to lament his sins.

So all together are not able to bind a righteous man or retain his sins when he humbles himself with his whole heart and has a contrite heart, a thing which God does not despise. Wherefore St. Jerome, commenting on Matt. 16:19, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,” etc., says: “Some not understanding this passage appropriate something of the arrogance of the Pharisees so as to think that they can damn the guiltless and loose offenders, for with God not the judgment of priests is sought but the life of the guilty.” To these words the Master of Sentences adds: “Here it is plainly shown that God does not follow the sentence of the church which judges in ignorance and deceitfully” (4:18, *cap.* 6). He also adds: “Sometimes he who is sent outdoors, that is, outside of holy church, by the priest, is, nevertheless, inside. And he who, by virtue of the truth, is outside, seems to be kept inside by the priest’s false sentence” (*cap.* 8). And again he says that the priest who binds and looses others ought himself to be prudent and just, for otherwise he will put to death souls who do not die and revive souls which do not live, and in this way he turns his power of pronouncing judgment into an instrument of cursing—so that it is said in Mal. 2:2: “I will bless your cursings and curse your blessings” (4:19, *cap.* 4). Therefore the vicars of Christ ought to take heed that they do not lightly presume to bind or loose whenever it pleases them. [...]

For every man who, being penitent, is according to the rite loosed on earth by Christ’s vicar on the earth, he also is loosed in heaven—just as he who has believed and is baptized shall be saved, and he who has believed in love shall be saved finally. For “believe” here is to be accepted as in John 3:36, “He that believeth on

the Son hath eternal life,” and if it shall be argued that whosoever believeth on the Son hath eternal life: every Christian believes on the Son of God, therefore every Christian hath eternal life—or, again, if it be argued that whosoever believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life but that reprobate, who is in grace, believes on the Son of God, therefore that reprobate has eternal life—in these cases the conclusion is false. And both these conclusions are invalid, because “to believe” is one thing in the major premise and another thing in the minor. Hence, in order to correct the statement the argument must run in this way: whosoever believes with love in the Son of God and perseveres. In this case the consequence is good [he shall be finally saved]. But the minor statement the objector should prove [namely, that every Christian believes with love of God]. Similar is the case with the second conclusion and its minor premise: namely, “that reprobate who is in grace believes with love in the Son of God and perseveres.” This reasoning is false.

From the things already said, it is clear what the power of the keys is and what is catholic belief on the subject, namely, that every priest of Christ ordained according to the rite has the sufficient power to confer the sacraments appertaining to him and consequently to absolve a person truly contrite from sin, howbeit power of this kind, so far as the exercise of it goes, is for good reasons bound in the case of many persons, as appears near the beginning of this chapter. But how this power belonged to the apostles equally is stated in the *Decretum*, *Dist. 21, in novo*, where it is said: “The other apostles with him, that is, Peter, by reason of equal fellowship received honor and power.... When these died, the bishops arose in their place.” And here the Gloss, *Argumentum*, says that the bishops are all equal in apostolic power, so far as the order and ground of consecration go. St. Cyprian says: “He gave to all the apostles after his resurrection equal power” (24 *cap. Loquitur*).

Hence it would be foolish to believe that the apostles received from Christ no spiritual gifts except what were derived by them immediately and purely from Peter, for Christ said to all: “Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth” (Matt. 18:18); also, “Receive

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ye the Holy Spirit: whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them” (John 20:23); and again, “This do ye in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19); and still again, “All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the ages” (Matt. 28:19, 20).





## INTRODUCTION TO MARTIN LUTHER'S *NINETY-FIVE THESES*

FEW DOCUMENTS in Christian history have become as iconic as Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*, the ringing denunciation of the corruptions of the late medieval church that was to spark the Protestant Reformation. Luther (1483–1546) may or may not have posted them on the church door in Wittenberg (he almost certainly did not nail them, in any case, as later legend would have it), but his dissemination of them on October 31, 1517 marked a turning point not only in Luther's life but in the life of the whole Christian church.

The document itself, however, is an unlikely candidate for the role of revolutionary text or Protestant manifesto: composed chiefly for an academic disputation on a practice now long-forgotten and scarce understood, the theses are a bit bewildering to the modern reader looking for familiar Reformation slogans. Indeed, neither of Luther's two great principles—justification by faith alone and the authority of Scripture alone—are to be found in these pages, even though the former had already begun to influence Luther's thinking and underlies several of his concerns in the *Theses*.

Judged by the standard of Luther's later work (even his writings from two or three years later), the *Theses* is a fairly conservative text, and Luther hardly expected them to unleash a full-scale reconception of Christian theology and division of the church. At this time, Luther was not so much interested in overthrowing the whole penitential system of the Catholic Church as in purifying it from obvious abuses, and he continued to accept many of the Pope's

claims of authority. Indeed, in Theses 80-90 he says that one of his chief concerns is to defend the honor of the Pope against the easy attacks that to which the careless teaching of the indulgence preachers has exposed him.

On the other hand, it is easy to downplay too much the significance of the *Theses*. Luther was not, after all, just a random and inconsequential monk, as the Pope and his advisors were to try to dismiss him; he was at this time one of the highest-ranking leaders of the Augustinian Order in Germany and an increasingly-renowned professor at one of its leading universities. Moreover, Luther did not compose the *Theses* on a whim; he had been long wrestling over the indulgences issue and was well aware that by attacking the practice, he would likely be earning himself some very powerful enemies. Finally, although theses were normally composed for academic disputations only, Luther seems to have from the first intended these for a wider audience. As scholar Timothy J. Wengert notes, the *Theses* are full of rhetorical flourishes that suggest Luther wanted to reach and persuade many educated readers,<sup>1</sup> and, very unusually for such theses, Luther from the first invited scholars from around Germany to respond to the theses in writing. Indeed, there does not ever seem to have been an academic disputation in Wittenberg, as would normally have followed the proposal of such theses. Most striking of all, Luther took the extraordinary step of sending the *Theses* to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, the leading church authority in Germany, and exhorting him in no uncertain terms to restrain the indulgence preachers.

So who were these indulgence preachers and why was Luther so upset about them? The answer sheds light both on the astonishing depth of the late medieval church's corruption and on the often misunderstood heart of Luther's protest against it.

The theology and practice of indulgences had been around for centuries, although it had gotten increasingly out of hand in the

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's 95 Theses with Introduction, Commentary, and Study Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 5.

decades leading up to 1517. At its root lay a long medieval distinction between guilt and punishment: although true repentance of sins and confession to a priest could give the believer absolution from *guilt* and therefore from hellfire, sin still demanded some kind of temporal punishment. Some of this punishment could be handled by taking penitential actions prescribed by the priest, but much of it would remain to be exacted after death. Accordingly, the medieval church came increasingly to teach the doctrine of purgatory, a place where the faithful must undergo a long term (perhaps even hundreds of thousands of years) of purifying torment before they could enter heaven. But there was some good news. By doing certain holy acts, like participating in or helping pay for a Crusade, Christians could receive an “indulgence” from the Pope, shortening their time in purgatory or perhaps even skipping it altogether. Eventually, recognizing in indulgences a potentially immense source of revenue, later popes began offering them for money more often than for good deeds, and, needing to continue to expand the market to keep the revenues flowing, they started allowing the faithful to buy indulgences for their dead relatives already in purgatory.

Johann Tetzel’s (c. 1465–1519) indulgence campaign that prompted Luther’s protest in 1517, though, was an extraordinary illustration of the corruption that came from mixing such absolute spiritual power with the wide-reaching worldly power of the late medieval church. Ostensibly ordered to help finance the construction of St. Peter’s basilica in Rome, much of the money actually went into the coffers of Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz. Albrecht needed it to repay the Fugger banking family for immense debts he had contracted to buy from the Pope the most powerful church office in Germany at the age of 23. Since the most enthusiastic buyers of indulgences were the uneducated and gullible poor, Tetzel’s indulgence campaign constituted an extraordinary redistribution of wealth upward from the poorest to the richest in Christendom.

Such exploitation of the poor infuriated Luther, and in thesis 45, he decries those who, instead of helping the needy, as Christ commanded for the truly penitent, spent all their spare money on indulgences. More fundamentally, though, Luther worried that indulgences were a form of cheap grace, a way for people to purchase false security for their souls without truly facing the depth of their sin and repenting from the heart. The earlier distinction between guilt and punishment had been thoroughly blurred so that indulgences had become, in the minds of the public, encouraged by salesmen like Tetzl, a substitute for true repentance, purchasing freedom from guilt as well as punishment. This point is key to grasp, given how readily Luther's gospel of salvation by faith alone is often distorted. Luther's concern with the late medieval church was less that it had made salvation too hard (by endless works rather than simple faith) and more that it had made salvation too easy (by thoughtless outward works or transactions rather than heartfelt repentance, being crucified with Christ). The real gospel of Christ, charged Luther, was both much more serious, more frightening, and more liberating than the spiritual economy the popes had created to fill their own coffers.

### Further Reading

For further reading, see Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), ch. 5; Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's 95 Theses with Introduction, Commentary, and Study Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015); David Bagchi, "Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* and the Contemporary Critique of Indulgences" in Robert N. Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 331–56.

## MARTIN LUTHER, *THE NINETY-FIVE THESES (1517)*<sup>1</sup>

OUT OF LOVE for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter.

In the Name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said *Poenitentiam agite*<sup>2</sup>, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.
3. Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work diverse mortifications of the flesh.
4. The penalty [of sin], therefore, continues so long as hatred of self continues; for this is the true inward repentance, and continues until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by C.M. Jacobs in Henry Eyster Jacobs and Adolph Spaeth, eds., *Works of Martin Luther, with Introductions and Notes*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1915).

<sup>2</sup> Latin for “Do repentance.”

6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despoised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven.
7. God remits guilt to no one whom He does not, at the same time, humble in all things and bring into subjection to His vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to them, nothing should be imposed on the dying.
9. Therefore the Holy Spirit in the pope is kind to us, because in his decrees he always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.
10. Ignorant and wicked are the doings of those priests who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penances for purgatory.
11. This changing of the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory is quite evidently one of the tares that were sown while the bishops slept.
12. In former times the canonical penalties were imposed not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties; they are already dead to canonical rules, and have a right to be released from them.
14. The imperfect health [of soul], that is to say, the imperfect love, of the dying brings with it, of necessity, great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater is the fear.
15. This fear and horror is sufficient of itself alone (to say nothing of other things) to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ as do despair, almost-despair, and the assurance of safety.
17. With souls in purgatory it seems necessary that horror should grow less and love increase.
18. It seems unproved, either by reason or Scripture, that they are outside the state of merit, that is to say, of increasing love.

## NINETY-FIVE THESES

19. Again, it seems unproved that they, or at least that all of them, are certain or assured of their own blessedness, though we may be quite certain of it.
20. Therefore by “full remission of all penalties” the pope means not actually “of all,” but only of those imposed by himself.
21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope’s indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved;
22. Whereas he remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to the canons, they would have had to pay in this life.
23. If it is at all possible to grant to any one the remission of all penalties whatsoever, it is certain that this remission can be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to the very fewest.
24. It must needs be, therefore, that the greater part of the people is deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.
25. The power which the pope has, in a general way, over purgatory, is just like the power which any bishop or curate has, in a special way, within his own diocese or parish.
26. The pope does well when he grants remission to souls [in purgatory], not by the power of the keys (which he does not possess), but by way of intercession.
27. They preach man who say that so soon as the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out [of purgatory].
28. It is certain that when the penny jingles into the money-box, gain and avarice can be increased, but the result of the intercession of the Church is in the power of God alone.
29. Who knows whether all the souls in purgatory wish to be bought out of it, as in the legend of Sts. Severinus and Paschal.
30. No one is sure that his own contrition is sincere; much less that he has attained full remission.
31. Rare as is the man that is truly penitent, so rare is also the man who truly buys indulgences, i.e., such men are most rare.

32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon.

33. Men must be on their guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to Him;

34. For these "graces of pardon" concern only the penalties of sacramental satisfaction, and these are appointed by man.

35. They preach no Christian doctrine who teach that contrition is not necessary in those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessionalia.

36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.

37. Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without letters of pardon.

38. Nevertheless, the remission and participation [in the blessings of the Church] which are granted by the pope are in no way to be despised, for they are, as I have said, the declaration of divine remission.

39. It is most difficult, even for the very keenest theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the abundance of pardons and [the need of] true contrition.

40. True contrition seeks and loves penalties, but liberal pardons only relax penalties and cause them to be hated, or at least, furnish an occasion [for hating them].

41. Apostolic pardons are to be preached with caution, lest the people may falsely think them preferable to other good works of love.

42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend the buying of pardons to be compared in any way to works of mercy.

43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons;



## NINETY-FIVE THESES

44. Because love grows by works of love, and man becomes better; but by pardons man does not grow better, only more free from penalty.
45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives [his money] for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the pope, but the indignation of God.
46. Christians are to be taught that unless they have more than they need, they are bound to keep back what is necessary for their own families, and by no means to squander it on pardons.
47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of pardons is a matter of free will, and not of commandment.
48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting pardons, needs, and therefore desires, their devout prayer for him more than the money they bring.
49. Christians are to be taught that the pope's pardons are useful, if they do not put their trust in them; but altogether harmful, if through them they lose their fear of God.
50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the pardon-preachers, he would rather that St. Peter's church should go to ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that it would be the pope's wish, as it is his duty, to give of his own money to very many of those from whom certain hawkers of pardons cajole money, even though the church of St. Peter might have to be sold.
52. The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain, even though the commissary, nay, even though the pope himself, were to stake his soul upon it.
53. They are enemies of Christ and of the pope, who bid the Word of God be altogether silent in some Churches, in order that pardons may be preached in others.
54. Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or a longer time is spent on pardons than on this Word.
55. It must be the intention of the pope that if pardons, which are a very small thing, are celebrated with one bell, with single proces-

sions and ceremonies, then the Gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.

56. The “treasures of the Church,” out of which the pope grants indulgences, are not sufficiently named or known among the people of Christ.

57. That they are not temporal treasures is certainly evident, for many of the vendors do not pour out such treasures so easily, but only gather them.

58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the Saints, for even without the pope, these always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outward man.

59. St. Lawrence said that the treasures of the Church were the Church’s poor, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.

60. Without rashness we say that the keys of the Church, given by Christ’s merit, are that treasure;

61. For it is clear that for the remission of penalties and of reserved cases, the power of the pope is of itself sufficient.

62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.

63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.

64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.

65. Therefore the treasures of the Gospel are nets with which they formerly were wont to fish for men of riches.

66. The treasures of the indulgences are nets with which they now fish for the riches of men.

67. The indulgences which the preachers cry as the “greatest graces” are known to be truly such, insofar as they promote gain.

68. Yet they are in truth the very smallest graces compared with the grace of God and the piety of the Cross.

69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of apostolic pardons, with all reverence.

## NINETY-FIVE THESES

70. But still more are they bound to strain all their eyes and attend with all their ears, lest these men preach their own dreams instead of the commission of the pope.
71. He who speaks against the truth of apostolic pardons, let him be anathema and accursed!
72. But he who guards against the lust and license of the pardon-preachers, let him be blessed!
73. The pope justly thunders against those who, by any art, contrive the injury of the traffic in pardons.
74. But much more does he intend to thunder against those who use the pretext of pardons to contrive the injury of holy love and truth.
75. To think the papal pardons so great that they could absolve a man even if he had committed an impossible sin and violated the Mother of God—this is madness.
76. We say, on the contrary, that the papal pardons are not able to remove the very least of venial sins, so far as its guilt is concerned.
77. It is said that even St. Peter, if he were now pope, could not bestow greater graces; this is blasphemy against St. Peter and against the pope.
78. We say, on the contrary, that even the present pope, and any pope at all, has greater graces at his disposal; to wit, the Gospel, powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written in I Corinthians xii.
79. To say that the cross, emblazoned with the papal arms, which is set up [by the preachers of indulgences], is of equal worth with the Cross of Christ, is blasphemy.
80. The bishops, curates and theologians who allow such talk to be spread among the people will have an account to render.
81. This unbridled preaching of pardons makes it no easy matter, even for learned men, to rescue the reverence due to the pope from slander, or even from the shrewd questionings of the laity.
82. To wit: “Why does not the pope empty purgatory, for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable

money with which to build a Church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial.”

83. Again: “Why are mortuary and anniversary masses for the dead continued, and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded on their behalf, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?”

84. Again: “What is this new piety of God and the pope, that for money they allow a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God, and do not rather, because of that pious and beloved soul’s own need, free it for pure love’s sake?”

85. Again: “Why are the penitential canons long since in actual fact and through disuse abrogated and dead, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences, as though they were still alive and in force?”

86. Again: “Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the riches of the richest, build just this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of poor believers?”

87. Again: “What is it that the pope remits, and what participation does he grant to those who, by perfect contrition, have a right to full remission and participation?”

88. Again: “What greater blessing could come to the Church than if the pope were to do a hundred times a day what he now does once, and bestow on every believer these remissions and participations?”

89. “Since the pope, by his pardons, seeks the salvation of souls rather than money, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons granted heretofore, since these have equal efficacy?”

90. To repress these arguments and scruples of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the Church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies, and to make Christians unhappy.

91. If, therefore, pardons were preached according to the spirit and mind of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved; nay, they would not exist.

## NINETY-FIVE THESES

92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, “Peace, peace,” and there is no peace!
93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, “Cross, cross,” and there is no cross!
94. Christians are to be exhorted that they be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hell;
95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven rather through many tribulations, than through the assurance of peace.

## INTRODUCTION TO THOMAS MORE'S *DIALOGUE CONCERNING HERESIES*

Sir Thomas More's is one of the few names from the Reformation era to remain something of a household name today. His legacy rests chiefly his authorship of the humanist classic *Utopia* in 1516 and his execution (martyrdom) by Henry VIII in 1535, memorably depicted in Robert Bolt's great 1960 play (and 1966 film), *A Man for All Seasons*. Few realize, however (and few are likely to imagine, based on Bolt's portrayal), that between these two events, he spent a significant phase of his life as Henry's most implacable prosecutor of Lutheran "heresy" in England.

More (1478–1535), was a true "Renaissance man," gifted and tireless in both contemplation and in action. A close friend of Erasmus, he was perhaps England's pre-eminent proponent of humanist study and reform, and an internationally-recognized writer and scholar; but as the loyal servant of King Henry VIII and the Catholic Church, he was also a renowned lawyer, cunning diplomat, and indefatigable administrator. His meteoric rise to succeed Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor of England in 1529, however, was also the beginning of his fall. Appointed to the post precisely because of Wolsey's failure to secure for Henry a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, More found himself in an increasingly difficult position as Henry began to question papal authority in his determination to secure the divorce. More's allegiance to the English Crown was topped only by his allegiance to the Roman Church, and, in the end, unwilling to renounce the latter in order to serve the former, he lost his head, but gained an immortal reputation as a champion of conscience. More's notion of conscience, however,

was hardly ours. As John Guy notes, heretics like the Lutherans “were not allowed consciences,” in More’s thinking, “since they had deviated from the authority and tradition of the Catholic Church.”<sup>1</sup> “Conscience” for More meant simply submission to the authoritative consensus of the church’s teaching. It was precisely such an appeal to the church’s teaching authority that More was to make the cornerstone of his argument in his most important anti-Lutheran work, the *Dialogue Against Heresies* (1529).

Although the *Dialogue* was the result of a formal commission by Bishop of London Cuthbert Tunstal for More to head up anti-heresy propaganda, and was penned particularly in response to the recent trial of English reformer Thomas Bilney, the *Dialogue* was rooted in several years of theological polemic by More. This began with Henry VIII’s response to Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* with his own *Defence of the Seven Sacraments* in 1520, which More was asked to edit. When Luther responded in 1522, Henry commissioned More to respond, which he did in 1523 with the *Answer to Luther*. More wrote further against the Lutherans in the unpublished 1526 *Letter to Bugenhagen*, and when Lutheranism began to gain a foothold in England with William Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament into English that year, More began to pull out all the stops. In the flurry of polemical writing that began in 1529, many scholars suggest that the normally cool and judicious More lost his sense of proportion, becoming, in the words of C.S. Lewis, “monotonously anxious to conquer and to conquer equally, at every moment: to show in every chapter that every heretical book is wrong about everything.”<sup>2</sup> In the *Dialogue* itself, however, and especially its first half, More seeks to give at least something of a fair hearing to the opposition, at least by constructing the work as a dialogue in which both sides are presented. In Book I, “the Messenger” with whom More debates begins by mounting an attack on

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<sup>1</sup> John Guy, *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000), 201.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, The Oxford History of English Literature, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 174.

the liturgical corruptions of the late medieval church: praying to saints, worshipping images, going on pilgrimages, etc. More seeks to counter his long series of attacks first by insisting that the holy places and relics have been well-attested by miracles, before shifting the conversation to the more fundamental ground of authority, the issue on which More's critiques of Luther earlier in the 1520s had focused. Part of this key section, comprising chapters 18-31 of Book I, appears in the excerpt below. Since More appealed to the authority of "the Church," Book II moves on to the all-important Reformation ground of the definition of this church, with More rejecting Luther's insistence that the true church remains hidden in this world, before moving back to the debate over the worship of images. In Book III, More turns his attention to more immediate English affairs, seeking to justify the treatment of Thomas Bilney and other Lutheran heretics who had recently been prosecuted,<sup>3</sup> before turning in Book IV to a long harangue against "the most pestilent sect of these Lutherans," and especially Luther himself, and a justification of handing them over to be burned at the stake.

In the crucial section of Book I excerpted below, More articulates what has become a classic Roman Catholic argument against the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Beginning with Christ's promise to Peter that his faith will not fail, More argues that it must be understood as a promise that the faith of the church as a whole would not fail, throughout the centuries. By getting the Messenger to agree (with somewhat implausible ease) that this means that the church cannot then ever fail *either* to believe all the articles of the Christian faith that are necessary *or* to come to believe additional articles of faith beyond those that are necessary, More concludes that the church's traditional belief in the efficacy of relics, the worship of images, etc., cannot possibly be in error, since then faith would have failed in the church. To the Messenger's response that Christ, and the true faith, are always with the church in the form of

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<sup>3</sup> Bilney initially recanted in 1529, but then regretted his cowardice and began preaching the Protestant gospel again, leading to his 1531 martyrdom.



Scripture, More argues that Scripture is worthless without a reliable right interpretation, and that, unless we concede that the faith of the church has ever failed, we must believe that God has maintained in the authoritative teaching of the church the true understanding of Scripture.

In chapters 22 and 23, More turns to argue against a misleading stereotype of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture that remains common today: namely, that Protestants seek to approach Scripture in blind faith alone, without the interpretive aids of reasoning and the Church Fathers. More scores many easy points against the Messenger here, but at the cost of some consistency in his own argument, since earlier he had chided the Messenger for his overly rationalist refusal to believe in the miracles of relics on the grounds of “reason and nature.” Still, it is true that in the early stages of the Reformation in particular, the Reformers often spoke of faith and reason in ways that encouraged More’s caricature of a simplistic biblicism, a stance that later 16th-century Protestants were to oppose with a judicious retrieval of the role of philosophy in theology.

### **Further Reading**

For further reading, see John Guy, *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000); Judith H. Paterson, *Thomas More* (Boston: Twayne, 1979); C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, The Oxford History of English Literature, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), Bk. II, ch. 1.

**THOMAS MORE,  
DIALOGUE CONCERNING HERESIES  
(1529)<sup>1</sup>**

**The Nineteenth Chapter**

*THE AUTHOR proves that if the worship of images were idolatry, then the Church, believing it to be lawful and pleasant to God, were in a misbelief and in a deadly error. And then were the faith failed in the Church, whereof Christ has promised the contrary, as is proved in the chapter before.*

“Surely, sir,” said he, “that God made not his Church for a while, but to endure until the world’s end, that is there no Christian man but he will well agree. And since His Church cannot stand without faith, which is the entry into Christendom, for as Saint Paul says, *accidentem ad deum oportet credere* (“whoso will come to God must needs believe”), no man will deny but that faith is and always shall be in His Church. And that His Church not in faith only, and the knowledge of the truths necessary to be known for our soul’s health, but also to the doing of good works and avoiding of evil is, has been, and ever shall be specially guided and governed by God and the secret inspiration of his Holy Spirit.”

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<sup>1</sup> Modernized by Brian Marr from Thomas M.C. Lawler, Germain Marchadour, and Richard C. Marius, eds., *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, Vol. 6.1 of *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of Sir Thomas More* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

“Well,” said I, “then if the Church have faith, it errs not in belief.”

“That is true,” says he.

“It should err,” said I, “if it believed not all the truths that we are bound to believe.”

“What else?” said he.

“What, and we believed,” said I, “all that is true, and over that some other thing not only false, but also displeasing to God? Did we not then err in our necessary belief?”

“Whereby mean you that?” said he.

“As thus,” said I, “if that one believed in all the three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and therewith were persuaded that there were a fourth Person besides, equal and one god with them.”

“He must,” said he, “needs err in his necessary belief, by which he is bound to believe in the Trinity. And that fellow believes in a Quaternity!”

“That is,” said I, “the whole Trinity and one more.”

“But we be not only not bound,” said he, “to believe in any more, but also bound not to believe in any more.”

“Very well,” said I, “then errs he as much and as far lacks his right belief who believes too much, as he who believes too little, and he who believes something that he should not as he that believes not something that he should.”

“What else?” said he. “And what then?”

“Marry, this,” said I: “If we believe that it were lawful and well done to pray to saints, and to reverence their images, and do honor to their relics and visit pilgrimages. And then where we do these things, they were indeed not well done, but were displeasing to God, and by him reputed as a diminishment, and a withdrawing of the honor due to Himself, and therefore before His majesty reprov'd and odious and taken as idolatry. Were not this opinion a deadly, pestilent error in us and a plain lack of right faith?”

“Yes, before God,” said he.

## DIALOGUE CONCERNING HERESIES

“But you grant,” said I, “that the Church cannot err in the right faith necessary to be believed, which is given and always kept in the Church by God.”

“True,” said he.

“Then it follows,” said I, “that the Church in that it believes saints to be prayed unto, relics and images to be worshipped, and pilgrimages to be visited and sought is not deceived, nor does not err, but that the belief of the Church is true therein. And thereupon it also follows that the wonderful works done above nature at such images and pilgrimages, at holy relics, by prayers made unto saints, be not done by the devil to delude the Church of Christ therewith, since the thing that the Church does is well done and not idolatry, but by the great honor done unto saints God Himself the more highly honored, in that His servants have so much honor for His sake. And thereof follows it that Himself makes the miracles, [as proof] thereof.

“Also, if it be true that you have granted, that God keeps, and ever shall keep in His Church the right faith and right belief by the help of His own hand that has planted it, then can it not be that He shall suffer the devil to work wonders like unto His own miracles to bring his whole Church into a wrong faith. And then if those things be not done by the devil, I dare say you will not then deny but they be done by God. And so is yet again our purpose double proved. First, in that you grant that God will not suffer His Church to err in His right faith. Secondly (which pursues thereupon) by that He has by many a visible miracle declared that this faith and manner of observance is very pleasant and acceptable unto Him, which miracles since they be proved to be done upon good ground and cause appear well to be done by God and not by our ghostly enemy.”

## The Twentieth Chapter

*The messenger alleges that the perpetual being and assistance of Christ with His Church to keep it out of all damnable errors is nothing else but His being with His Church in Holy Scripture, whereof the author declares the contrary.*

“How think you?” said I. “Is there anything in this matter amiss?”

“I cannot well tell,” said he, “what I might answer thereto. But yet methinks that I come to this point by some oversight in granting.”

“Well,” said I, “men say sometimes when they would say or do a thing and cannot well come thereon but miss and oversee themselves in the assay, ‘It makes no matter,’ they say, ‘you may begin again and amend it, for it is neither Mass nor Matins.’<sup>2</sup> And albeit in this matter you have nothing granted but that is in my mind as true as the Matins or the Mass either, yet if you reckon yourself overswift in granting, I give you leave to go back and call again what you will.”

“In good faith,” said he, “full hard were it in mine own mind otherwise to think but that God shall always keep the right belief in His Church. But yet since we come to this conclusion by the granting thereof, let us look once again thereupon. And what if men would say, as I heard once one say myself, that God does peradventure not keep always faith in His Church to give them warning with when they do well and when the contrary, but since He has given them and left with them the Scripture, in which they may sufficiently see both what they should believe and what they should do, He lets them alone therewith without any other special cure of His upon their faith and belief. For therein they may see all that them needs if they will look and labor therein. And if they will not, the fault is their own sloth and folly! And whoso be willing to amend and be better may always have light to see how by recourse to the reading of Holy Scripture, which shall stand him in like stead

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<sup>2</sup> *neither Mass nor Matins*: Mass and Matins were solemn ceremonies of worship; if something is neither Mass nor Matins, it is unimportant.

as you said before, that God kept the faith for by His special means in His Church.”

“If this,” said I, “were thus, whereof should Christ’s promise serve, *Ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad finem saeculi* (‘I am with you all the days till the end of the world’)? Wherefore should He be here with His Church if His being here should not keep His right faith and belief in His Church?”

“Marry,” said he, “these words well agree withal! For God is and shall be until the world’s end with His Church in His Holy Scripture! As Abraham answered the rich man in hell, saying, ‘They have Moses and the prophets,’ not meaning that they had them all at that time present with them, but only that they had their books. And so Christ, forasmuch as the Scripture has His faith comprehended therein, according to His own words, *Scrutamini scripturas, quia scripturae sunt quae testimonium perhibent de me* (‘Search you the Scriptures for they bear witness of me’), therefore he said, *Ego vobiscum sum usque ad finem saeculi* (‘I am with you to the end of the world’), because His Holy Scripture shall never fail as long as the world endures. ‘Heaven and earth,’ he says, ‘shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away.’ And therefore in His holy writing is He with us still, and therein He keeps and teaches us His right faith if we list to look for it and else, as I said, our own fault and folly it is.”

“If God,” said I, “be none otherwise with us but in Holy Scripture, then be those words of Christ, ‘I am with you to the world’s end’ somewhat strangely spoken, and unlike the words of Abraham whereunto you resemble them. For Christ left never a book behind Him of His own making as Moses did and the prophets. And in their books was He spoken of, as He was in the Gospel. Wherefore if He had spoken and meant of Scripture, He would have said that they should have with them still His evangelists and writers of His gospels, as Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the prophets,’ which were the writers of the books that the Jews had. Christ also said, ‘I am with you till the end of the world,’ not ‘I shall be,’ but ‘I am,’ which is the word appropriated to His God-

head. And therefore that word ‘am’ is the name by which our Lord would, as He told Moses, be named unto Pharaoh, as a name which from all creatures (since they be all subject to time) clearly discern His Godhead, which is ever being and present, without difference of time past or to come. In which wise He was not in His Holy Scripture, for that had beginning. And at those words spoken was not yet all written. For of the chief part, which is the New Testament, there was yet at that time never one word written. And also we be not sure by any promise made that the Scripture shall endure to the world’s end, albeit I think verily the substance shall. But yet as I say, promise have we none thereof. For where our Lord says that His words shall not pass away, nor one iota thereof be lost, He spoke of His promises made indeed, as His faith and doctrine taught by mouth and inspiration. He meant not that of His Holy Scripture in writing there should never an iota be lost, of which some parts be already lost, more peradventure than we can tell of. And of that we have, the books in some part corrupted with miswriting. And yet the substance of those words that He meant be known, where some part of the writing is unknown. He says also that His Father and He should send the Holy Ghost, and also that He would come himself, whereto all this if He meant no more but to leave the books behind them and go their way? Christ is also present among us bodily in the Holy Sacrament. And is He there present with us for nothing? The Holy Ghost taught many things I think unwritten, and whereof some part was never comprised in the Scripture, yet unto this day, as the article which no good Christian man will doubt of, that our Blessed Lady was a perpetual virgin as well after the birth of Christ as before.

“Our Savior also said unto His apostles that when they should be accused and brought in judgment, they should not need to care for answer: it should even then be put in their minds. And that He meant not only the remembrance of Holy Scripture, which before the pagan judges were but a cold and bare alleging, but such words newly given them by God, inspired in their hearts so effectual and confirmed with miracles that their adversaries, though they

were angry thereat, yet should not be able to resist it. And thus with secret help and inspiration is Christ with His Church, and will be to the world's end present and assistant, not only spoken of in writing.”

## The Twenty-first Chapter

*The author shows that if it so were indeed as the messenger said, that is, to wit that Christ continued with His Church none otherwise but only by the leaving of His Holy Scripture to them, and that all the faith also were only therein, then should it yet follow that as far as the necessity of our salvation requires, God gives the Church the right understanding thereof. And thereupon [it] follows further that the Church cannot err in the right faith, whereupon is inferred soon afterwards all that the messenger would have fled from before. And thereon also specially [it] follows that all the texts of Holy Scripture which heretics allege against images or any point of the common belief of Christ's Catholic Church can nothing serve their purpose.*

“But now would I wit, since you reckon him none otherwise present than in Holy Scripture, whether then does He give His Church the right understanding of Holy Scripture or not?”

“What if he do not?” said he.

“Marry,” said I, “then yourself see well that they were as well without. And so should the Scripture stand them in as good stead as a pair of spectacles should stand a blind friar.”

“That is very true,” said he. “But therefore has His wisdom and goodness provided it so to be written that it may be well understood by the collation<sup>3</sup> and consideration of one text with another.”

“May it not also be,” said I, “that some of them which do read it diligently, and diligently compare and consider every text, how it may stand with other may yet for all that mistake and misunderstand it?”

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<sup>3</sup> *collation*: collection or comparison.



“Yes,” said he, “it may be so. For else had there not been so many heretics as there have been.”

“Very true,” said I. “But now if all the faith be in Holy Scripture and no part thereof anywhere else, but that it must be therein altogether learned, were it then sufficient to understand some part aright, and some other part wrong in the necessary points of our faith, or must we, as far forth as concerns the necessity thereof, misunderstand no part?”

“We must,” said he, “mistake no part, as far as necessarily concerns our faith. But we must have so the right understanding of [it] all together, that we conceive no damnable error.”

“Well said!” said I. “Then if we must, we may. For if we may not, we must not. For our Lord binds no man to an impossibility.”

“We may,” said he.

“If we may,” said I, “then may we either by good hap fall into the right understanding, or else by natural reason come to it, or else by supernatural grace be led into it.”

“That is truth,” said he. “Needs must it be one of these ways.”

“Well,” said I, “we will not yet search which. But I would first wit whether Christ have a Church in the world continually and so shall have to the world’s end, or else has one sometimes, and sometimes none at all. As we might think that He had one while He was here Himself, and peradventure a while after, and haply none at all ever since, nor shall not again we wot not when.”

“Nay,” said he, “that cannot be in no wise, but that He must needs have His Church continue still somewhere, for else how could He be with them continually to the world’s end, in Scripture or otherwise, if they (with whom He promised to be and continue to the world’s end) should not continually so long endure? Or how could those words of Christ be true, ‘Lo, I am with you all the days to the world’s end,’ if before the world’s end He were away some days, as He were indeed from the Church some days, if in some days He had no Church?”

“Well,” said I, “yet would I wit one thing more. Can He have a Church without faith?”

“Nay,” said he, “that were impossible.”

“Forsooth,” said I, “so were it. For His Church is a congregation of people gathered into His faith. And faith is the first substantial difference discerning Christian men from heathen, as reason is the difference dividing man from all the kinds of brute beasts. Now then, if His Church be and ever shall be continual without any times between (in which there shall be none), and without faith it may never be, and no part of the faith is as you say elsewhere had but in Holy Scripture, and all it must be had, and also as we were agreed a little while before, there must be none error adjoined thereto, and therefore as far as touches the necessity of faith, no part of Scripture may be mistaken, but all must be understood rightly and may be rightly understood either by hap, reason, or help of grace, it necessarily follows that by one or other of these ways the Church of Christ has always and never fails, the right understanding of Scripture, as far as belongs for our necessity.”

“That follows indeed,” said he.

“Well,” said I, “let pass for the while what follows further. And since the Church so has let us first agree by which of these three ways the Church has it, whether by hap, reason, or grace.”

“By hap,”<sup>4</sup> said he, “were a poor having. For so might it hap to have and hap to fail.

“Then,” said I, “since it has it ever, it cannot be by hap. What think you, then, of reason?”

“As little,” said he, “as any man thinks! For I take reason for plain enemy to faith!”

“You take peradventure wrong,” said I. “But thereof shall we see further after. But now since you so think you leave but the third way, which is the help of grace.”

“No, surely,” said he.

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<sup>4</sup> *hap*: chance or fortune.

“Verily,” said I, “where reason may between divers texts stand in great doubt which way to lean, I think that God with His Holy Spirit leads His Church into the consent of the truth. As Himself said that the Holy Ghost (whom he would send) should lead them into all truth. He said not that the Holy Ghost should at His coming write them all truth, nor tell them all the whole truth by mouth, but that He should by secret inspiration lead them into all truth. And therefore surely for a true conclusion in such means by God Himself, by the help of His grace (as yourself grants), the right understanding of Scripture is ever preserved in His Church from all such mistaking whereof might follow any damnable error concerning the faith. And thereof does there first follow that besides the Scripture itself, there is another present assistance and special cure of God perpetual with His Church to keep it in the right faith, that it err not by misunderstanding of Holy Scripture, contrary to the opinion that you purposed when you said that Christ’s being with his Church was only the leaving of His Holy Scripture to us. And over this, if God were no otherwise present than you speak of, yet since it is proved that His Church for all that ever has the right understanding of Scripture, we be come to the same point again that you would so fain flit from. For if the Scripture (and nothing but the Scripture) does contain all things that we be bound to believe and to do and to forbear, and that God also therefore provides for His Church the right understanding thereof, concerning everything necessary for us that is contained in Scripture, then must there needs follow thereupon the thing that you feared lest you had wrongly and unadvisedly granted, that is, to wit, that God always keeps the right faith in His Church. And thereupon [it] follows further [that] the remnant of all that is in question between us, that the faith of the Church in the worship that it believes to be well given unto saints, relics, and images is not erroneous but right. And thereupon [it] follows also that the miracles done at such places be none illusions of damned spirits, but the mighty hand of God, to show his pleasure in the corroboration thereof, and in the excitation of our devotion thereto.”

## DIALOGUE CONCERNING HERESIES

“Indeed,” said he, “we be come back here with going forward, as men walk in a maze.”

“You have not, yet,” said I, “lost all that labor. For though you have half a check in this point, yet have you (if you perceive it) mated me in another point by one thing that is agreed between us now.”

“What is that?” said he.

“This,” said I, “that I have agreed as well as you that God has given His Church the right understanding of Scripture in as far forth as belongs to the necessity of salvation.”

“In what point,” said he, “has that mated you?”

“Why,” said I, “see you not that? Nay, then will I not tell you but if you hire me, or if I tell you, yet shall you not win the game thereby. For since you see it not yourself, it is but a blind-mate.”

“Let me know it yet,” said he, “and I am agreed to take none advantage thereof.”

“On that bargain be it,” said I.

“You wot<sup>5</sup> well,” said I, “that against the worshipping of images and praying to saints, you laid certain texts of Scripture to prove it forbidden and reputed of God for idolatry. For answer whereof when I laid that men must lean to the sentence that the Church and holy doctors of the Church give to those texts, you said they were but men’s false glosses against God’s true texts. And now, since you grant and I also that the Church cannot misunderstand the Scripture to the hindrance of the right faith in things of necessity, and that you also acknowledge this matter to be such that it must either be the right belief and acceptable service to God, or else a wrong and erroneous opinion and plain idolatry, it follows of necessity that the Church does not misunderstand those texts that you or any other can allege and bring forth for that purpose. But that all these texts be so to be taken and understood as they nothing make against the Church, but all against your own opinion in this matter.

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<sup>5</sup> *wot*: say.

“And thus have you suddenly answered yourself to all those texts out of hand, with a gloss of your own, as true as any text in the Bible, and which all the world will never avoid, except they would make the Scripture serve the Church of naught, or rather to their hindrance than furtherance in the faith. For so were it if it might be that God gives them not the good understanding thereof, but suffers them to be deceived and deluded in errors by the mistaking of the letter.”

“Marry,” said he, “this is a blind-mate indeed!”

“Surely,” said I, “these two things seem to me two as true points and as plain to a Christian man as any petition of Euclid’s geometry is to a reasonable man. For as true as it is that every whole thing is more than its own half, as true is it indeed, and to every Christian man, faith makes it as certain, first, that Christ’s Church cannot err in any such article as God upon pain of loss of heaven will that we believe, and thereupon [it] necessarily follows that there is no text of Scripture well understood by which Christian people are commanded to do the thing which the Church believes that they may lawfully leave undone, nor any text whereby we be forbidden anything which the Church believes that they may lawfully do.”

## The Twenty-second Chapter

*Because the messenger had in the beginning showed himself desirous and greedy upon the text of Scripture with little force of the old Fathers’ glosses, and with dispraise of philosophy and almost all the seven liberal sciences, the author therefore incidentally shows what harm has happed sometimes to fall to divers of those young men whom he has known to give their study to the Scripture only, with contempt of logic and other secular sciences, and little regard of the old interpreters. Wherefore the author shows that in the study of Scripture, the sure way is with virtue and prayer first to use the judgment of natural reason, whereunto secular literature helps much. And secondly, the comments of holy doctors. And thirdly, above all things, the articles of the Catholic faith, received and believed through the Church of Christ.*

## ABOUT THE DAVENANT INSTITUTE

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