

2.15 Luther: *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (August 18, 1520)

LW 44: 126–7, 129, 133–34, 136–7, 175, 189–90, 205–6

The Romanists have very cleverly built three walls around themselves. Hitherto they have protected themselves by these walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them. As a result, the whole of Christendom has fallen abominably.

In the first place . . . they have made decrees and declared that the temporal power had no jurisdiction over them, but that on the contrary, the spiritual power is above the temporal. In the second place, when the attempt is made to reprove them with the Scriptures, they raise the objection that only the pope may interpret the Scriptures. In the third place, if threatened with a council, their story is that no one may summon a council but the pope. . . .

Let us begin by attacking the first wall. . . . [A]ll Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. . . . This is because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike: for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people. . . . [W]e are all consecrated priests through baptism. . . .

It follows from this argument that there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status. . . .

The second wall is still more loosely built and less substantial. The Romanists want to be the only masters of Holy Scripture, although they never learn a thing from the Bible all their life long. They [try] . . . to persuade us that the pope cannot err in matters of faith. . . .

Therefore, their claim that only the pope may interpret Scripture is an outrageous fancied fable. They cannot produce a single letter [of Scripture] to maintain that the interpretation of Scripture or the confirmation of its interpretation belongs to the pope alone. . . .

The third wall falls of itself when the first two are down. When the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by the Scriptures, to reprove him and to constrain him, according to the word of Christ, Matthew 18[15–17]. . . .

The Romanists have no basis in Scripture for their claim that the pope alone has the right to call or confirm a council. . . .

We also see how the priesthood has fallen, and how many a poor priest is overburdened with wife and child, his conscience troubled. Yet no one does anything to help him, though he could easily be helped. . . . And this is what I say: according to the institution of Christ and the apostles, every city should have a priest or bishop, as St. Paul clearly says in Titus 1[5]. And this priest should not be compelled to live without a wedded wife, but should be permitted to have one, as St. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3[2, 4] and Titus 1[67]. . . .

2.4 Luther: “Disputation Against Scholastic Theology” (September 4, 1517)

LW 31: 10–12

17. Man is by nature unable to want God to be God. Indeed, he himself wants to be God, and does not want God to be God.

28. If it is said of the Scripture passages, “Return to me, . . . and I will return to you” [Zech. 1:3], “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” [Jas. 4:8], “Seek and you will find” [Matt. 7:7], “You will seek me and find me” [Jer. 29:13], and the like, that one is by nature, the other by grace, this is no different from asserting what the Pelagians said.

29. The best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole means of obtaining grace is the eternal election and predestination from God.

30. On the part of man, however, nothing precedes grace except ill will and even rebellion against grace.

33. And this is false, that doing all that one is able to do can remove obstacles to grace. This in opposition to several authorities. [Cf. 1.21]

34. In brief, man by nature has neither correct precept nor good will.

40. We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds but, having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds. This in opposition to the philosophers.

50. Briefly, the whole of Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light. This in opposition to the scholastics.

One of the greatest necessities is the abolition of all begging throughout Christendom. Nobody ought to go begging among Christians. It would even be a very simple matter to make a law to the effect that every city should look after its own poor, if only we had the courage and the intention to do so. No beggar from outside should be allowed into the city whether he might call himself pilgrim or mendicant monk. Every city should support its own poor, and if it was too small, the people in the surrounding villages should also be urged to contribute, since in any case they have to feed many vagabonds and evil rogues who call themselves mendicants. In this way, too, it could be known who was really poor, and who was not. . . .

Above all, the foremost reading for everybody, both in the universities and in the schools, should be Holy Scripture – and for the younger boys, the Gospels. And would to God that every town had a girls' school as well, where the girls would be taught the Gospel for an hour every day either in German or in Latin. . . . Is it not only right that every Christian man know the entire holy gospel by the age of nine or ten? Does he not derive his name and his life from the gospel? A spinner or a seamstress teaches her daughter her craft in her early years. But today even the great, learned prelates and the very bishops do not know the gospel.

2.16 Luther: *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (October 6, 1520)

LW 36: 18, 27–30, 35–8, 66

To begin with, I must deny that there are seven sacraments, and for the present maintain that there are but three: baptism, penance [later dropped as a sacrament], and the bread. All three have been subjected to a miserable captivity by the Roman curia, and the church has been robbed of all her liberty. . . .

The first captivity of this sacrament, therefore, concerns its substance or completeness, which the tyranny of Rome has wrested from us. . . . The sacrament does not belong to the priests, but to all men. The priests are not lords, but servants in duty bound to administer both kinds to those who desire them, as often as they desire them. If they wrest this right from the laity and deny it to them by force, they are tyrants. . . .

The second captivity of this sacrament is less grievous as far as the conscience is concerned, yet the gravest of dangers threatens the man who would attack it. . . .

Some time ago, when I was drinking in scholastic theology, the learned cardinal of Cambrai [Pierre d'Ailly] gave me food for thought in his comments on the fourth book of the *Sentences* [Peter Lombard's (d. 1160) classic theological textbook]. He argues with great acumen that to hold that real bread and real wine, and not merely their accidents, are present on the

altar, would be much more probable and require fewer superfluous miracles – if only the church had not decreed otherwise. When I learned later what church it was that had decreed this, namely the Thomistic – that is, the Aristotelian church – I grew bolder, and after floating in a sea of doubt, I at last found rest for my conscience in the above view; namely, that it is real bread and real wine, in which Christ's real flesh and real blood are present in no other way and to no less a degree than the others assert them to be under their accidents. . . .

The third captivity of this sacrament is by far the most wicked abuse of all, in consequence of which there is no opinion more generally held or more firmly believed in the church today than this, that the mass is a good work and a sacrifice. And this abuse has brought an endless host of other abuses in its train, so that the faith of this sacrament has become utterly extinct and the holy sacrament has been turned into mere merchandise, a market, and a profit-making business. . . . On these the priests and monks depend for their entire livelihood. . . .

Let this stand, therefore, as our first and infallible proposition – the mass or Sacrament of the Altar is Christ's testament, which he left behind him at his death to be distributed among his believers. . . .

A testament as everyone knows, is a promise made by one about to die, in which he designates his bequest and appoints his heirs. A testament, therefore, involves first, the death of the testator, and second, the promise of an inheritance and the naming of the heir. . . .

[Re baptism] Thus it is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in that word of promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies, and fulfills that which baptism signifies. . . .