

ros (1436-1517). As Archbishop of Toledo and confessor to Queen Isabel (?: 1451-1504), Cisneros established seminaries for the nation's priests, demanded regular visits by bishops to their subordinate clergy, printed manuals of instruction and catechism, drove corrupt monks into conformity or exile, and produced the first multi-lingual Bible. His activities in reforming the clergy were models to Catholic states across Europe, and are typically cited to explain Protestantism's utter failure to penetrate Spain.

Most other European states, however, did not receive the farsighted and systematic Catholic reform Cisneros provided Castile. As a result, in much of Europe, the Catholic Church was faced with responding to the emerging Protestant challenges. The Church's institutional response, the Council of Trent (1545-1563), admitted, apologized for, and addressed many of the institutional abuses pointed out by Renaissance humanists and Protestant reformers. At the same time, the Council of Trent rejected Protestant theological claims and explicitly defined and explained Catholic dogma.

Believing many Protestants had embraced heresy through an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of Catholic doctrine, several new monastic orders were created specifically as educational orders. Some, like the Barnabites and Capuchins, focused on educating Catholics to prevent the spread of heresy. Others, like the Theatines, emphasized a role among Protestants, to win them back to the Church. The most famous of the new foundations, the Jesuits, gladly embraced both roles. Prominent individuals likewise labored to convert Protestants and educate Catholics. Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), for example, wrote *Concerning the Controversies of the Christian Faith Against the Heretics*, a persuasive defense of Catholic doctrine, and Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) wrote *The Defense of the Catholic Faith Against Anglican Errors* specifically to refute Protestant claims made by the James I (?: 1603-1625), King of England.

Despite the profound, and sometimes violent, disagreements among Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists, they all agreed in their condemnation of one group—Anabaptists, the most radical elements of the Protestant movement. Never a single group, Anabaptists did share certain beliefs in common. Central among these beliefs, and the source of their name, Anabaptists believed in the necessity of adult baptism. Many of their other tenets marked them as socially marginal at best, revolutionary at worst. Their refusal to take oaths precluded them from most public service. Their emphatic pacifism further distanced them from the communities in which they resided. Their egalitarianism suggested a rejection of the very ideas of property and social order. Extremists, such as the murderous Zwickau Prophets, simply confirmed the fears of their detractors. To all other Christians, then, the Anabaptists were an example of reform run wild—an excess of zeal uncoupled from traditional authority and educated leaders—and were the most consistently persecuted group in every part of Europe.

## ADDRESS TO THE CHRISTIAN NOBILITY MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, most Christians generally agreed that the Church was in serious need of reform, as it had been from time to time in the past. The financial expedients to which the Avignon popes (1309-1377) had resorted to replace the traditional revenues they could not collect, together with the general perception that they were puppets of the kings of France, had undermined confidence in the impartiality and integrity of the papal office. The unseemly scramble for support during and after the Great Schism (1378-1415), as well as the tendency of more recent popes to focus on the Papal States, had further eroded the papacy's credibility.

In some areas, pluralism (the holding of more than one Church office, especially more than one that involved pastoral duties) and worldly lifestyles among the clergy had led to a significant loss of respect among the ordinary faithful, for many of whom religious practice had become largely a matter of external observance. It was clearly time for some soul-searching and thoughtful men of the day such as Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466-1536), Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), and others brought the techniques of the new humanist scholarship to bear on the problems of the contemporary Church.

For a variety of reasons, the situation in the early sixteenth century differed from other periods that preceded major reform movements within the Church. Though still cherished by many, the ideal of a single Christian commonwealth had been declining for quite some time in the face of increasing loyalty to secular kingdoms. The growing diversity of lay religious experience meant the institutional Church no longer offered the only channel of access to God. The advent of paper in the fourteenth century and printing with movable type in the fifteenth made it possible for new ideas to circulate faster and more widely than ever before. But above all else, for the first time prominent reformers took issue with Church teaching more than with the conduct of the clergy. In a lecture on Galatians in 1535, Martin Luther wrote:

*First Principles of the Reformation*, ed. Harry Wace and C. A. Buchheim (London: John Murray, 1883), 617-26.

Corruption  
made Luther's  
message  
resonant

is real enemies  
of the monks

If the papacy still had the sanctity and austerity of life that it had at the time of fathers like Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and others, when the clergy did not yet have an evil reputation for simony, extravagance, pleasures, wealth, adultery, sodomy, and countless other sins, but lived in accordance with the canons and decrees of the fathers, outwardly religious and holy, and even practiced celibacy—what, I ask you, would we have been able to do against the papacy?... But even if the religion and discipline of the papacy stood now as it did once, we would still have to follow the example of Paul, who attacked the false apostles despite their holy and virtuous fronts, and battle against the self-righteousness of the papal kingdom.... Therefore we should pay attention not so much to the sinful lives of the papists as to their wicked doctrine and their hypocrisy and this is what we chiefly attack. Let us suppose that the religion and the discipline of the ancient papacy were flourishing now and were being observed with the same rigor with which the hermits, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Bernard, Francis, Dominic, and many others observed it. We would still have to say, "If you have nothing to set against the wrath of God except your sanctity and the chastity of your lives, you are clearly sons of the slave woman, who must be cast out of the kingdom of heaven and condemned"... Therefore we are fighting today, not against the obvious wickedness and vice of the papacy but against its fictitious saints who think that they lead an angelic life when they observe not only the commandments of God but also the counsels of Christ and works that are not required or works of supererogation. We say that this is a waste of time and effort, unless they have grasped that "one thing" which Christ says is the only thing "needful."

Some twenty years before he delivered this lecture, Luther's study of the Scriptures had led him to a fundamentally new insight on the matter of justification, or how man entered into a right relationship with God; faith alone was necessary for salvation. In the light of this breakthrough, Luther rethought his views on the sacraments, the authority of the clergy and the Scriptures, the role of good works in the Christian life, and most other aspects of traditional Christianity.

The following two readings come from two of Luther's three great Reformation tracts of 1520. In *The Address to the Christian Nobility*, he called on the German princes to reform the Church, beginning with certain major issues to which Luther referred as "the three walls of the

*Romanists.*" In this tract he explained the doctrine that came to be called "the priesthood of all believers." Later the same year he wrote *On Christian Liberty*, which he dedicated to Pope Leo X, to set forth his view of the relationship between faith and works in the Christian life.

1520

The grace and might of God be with you, Most Serene Majesty! Most gracious, well-beloved gentlemen!

It is not out of mere arrogance and perversity that I, a single poor man, have taken upon me to address your lordships. The distress and misery that oppress all the Christian estates, more especially in Germany, have led not only myself, but everyone else, to cry aloud and to ask for help, and have now forced me not to cry out and to ask, if God would give His Spirit to anyone, to reach a hand to His wretched people. Councils have often put forward some remedy, but through the cunning of certain men it has been adroitly frustrated, and the evils have become worse; whose malice and wickedness I will now, by the help of God, expose, so that, being known, they may henceforth cease to be so obstructive and injurious. God has given us a young and noble sovereign, and by this has roused hope in many hearts. Now it is right that we too should do what we can, and make good use of time and grace.

The first thing that we must do is to consider the matter with great earnestness and, whatever we attempt, not to trust in our own strength and wisdom alone, even if the power of all the world were ours; for God will not require that a good work should be begun, trusting to our own strength and wisdom. He destroys it; it is all useless: as we read in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. "There is nothing saved by the multitude of an host. A mighty man is not delivered by much strength." And I fear it is for that reason that those beloved princes, the Emperors Frederick the First and the Second, and many other German Emperors were, in former times, so pitreously spurned and oppressed by the Popes, though they were feared by all the world. Perchance they trusted rather in their own strength than in God; therefore they could not but fall. And how would the sanguinary tyrant Julius II<sup>1</sup> have risen to high in our own days but that, I fear, France, the Germans, and Venice trusted to themselves? The children of Benjamin slew forty-two thousand Israelites, for this reason that these trusted in their own strength.

That it may not happen thus to us and to our noble Emperor Charles<sup>2</sup>, we must remember that in this matter we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world, who may fill the world with war

<sup>1</sup>Julius II, Pope (1503–1513)

<sup>2</sup>Charles V (1500–1558), Holy Roman Emperor (1519–1556) and King of all the Spains (1516–1556)

and bloodshed, but cannot themselves be overcome thereby. We must renounce all confidence in our natural strength, and take the matter in hand with humble trust in God; we must seek God's help with earnest prayer, and have nothing before our eyes but the misery and wretchedness of Christendom, irrespective of what punishment the wicked may deserve. . . . The greater the might of the foe, the greater is the misfortune if we do not act in the fear of God, and with humility. As Popes and Romanists have hitherto, with the Devil's help, thrown kings into confusion, so will they still do, if we attempt things with our own strength and skill, without God's help.

### The Three Walls of the Romanists

10 The Romanists have, with great adroitness, drawn three walls round themselves with which they have hitherto protected themselves, so that no one could reform them, whereby all Christendom has fallen terribly.

15 Firstly, if pressed by the temporal power, they have affirmed and maintained that the temporal power has no jurisdiction over them, but, on the contrary, that the spiritual power is above the temporal.

Secondly, if it were proposed to admonish them with the Scriptures, they objected that no one may interpret the Scriptures but the Pope.

Thirdly, if they are threatened with a Council, they pretend that no one may call a Council but the Pope. . . .

### The First Wall

20 Let us, in the first place, attack the first wall. It has been devised that the Popes, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate; princes, lords, artificers, and peasants are the temporal estate; which is a very fine, hypocritical device. But let no one be made afraid by it; and that for this reason: that all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office alone. As Saint Paul says, we are all one body, though each member does its own work to serve the others. This is because we have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith, these alone make spiritual and Christian people.

30 As for the unction by a Pope or a bishop, tonsure, ordination, consecration, clothes differing from those of laymen—all this may make a hypocrite or an anointed puppet, but never a Christian or a spiritual man. Thus we are all consecrated as priests by baptism, as Saint Peter says, "You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation"; and in the book of Revelations, "and has made us unto our God, kings and priests." For, if we have not a higher consecration in us than Pope or bishop can give, no priest could ever be made by the consecration

of Pope or bishop; nor could he say the Mass, or preach, or absolve. Therefore the bishop's consecration is just as if in the name of the whole congregation he took one person out of the community, each member of which has equal power, and commanded him to exercise this power for the rest; in the same way as if ten brothers, co-heirs as king's sons, were to choose one from among them to deliver their inheritance; they would, all of them, still remain kings and have equal power, although one is ordered to govern.

10 And to put the matter even more plainly; if a little company of pious Christian laymen were taken prisoners and carried away to a desert, and had not among them a priest consecrated by a bishop, and were there to agree to elect one of them, married or un-married, and were to order him to baptize, to celebrate the Mass, to absolve and to preach; this man would as truly be a priest as if all the bishops and all the Popes had consecrated him. That is why in cases of necessity every man can baptize and absolve, which would not be possible if we were not all priests. This great grace and virtue of baptism and of the Christian estate they have almost destroyed and made us forget by their ecclesiastical law. In this way the Christians used to choose their bishops and priests out of the community; these being afterwards confirmed by other bishops, without the pomp that we have now. So was it that Saints Augustine, Ambrose, Cyprian were bishops.

20 Since then the temporal power is baptized as we are, and has the same faith and gospel, we must allow it to be priest and bishop, and account its office an office that is proper and useful to the Christian community. For whatever issues from baptism may boast that it has been consecrated priest, bishop, and Pope, although it does not beseech everyone to exercise these offices. For, since we are all priests alike, no man may put himself forward, or take upon himself, without our consent and election, to do that which we have all alike power to do. For, if a thing is common to all, no man may take it to himself without the wish and command of the community. And if it should happen that a man were appointed to one of these offices and deposed for abuses, he would be just what he was before. Therefore a priest should be nothing in Christendom but a functionary; as long as he holds his office he has precedence of others; if he is deprived of it, he is a peasant and a citizen like the rest. Therefore a priest is verily no longer a priest after deposition. But now they have invented *characters indelibles*, and pretend that a priest after deprivation still differs from a simple layman. They even imagine that a priest can never be anything but a priest; that is, that he can never become a layman. All this is nothing but mere talk and ordinance of human invention.

30 It follows then, that between layman and priests, princes and bishops, or as they call it, between spiritual and temporal persons, the only real difference is

one of office and function, and not of estate, for they are all of the same spiritual estate, true priests, bishops, and Popes, though their functions are not the same, just as among priests and monks every man has not the same functions. And this Saint Paul says and Saint Peter, "we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Christ's body is not double or two-fold, one temporal, the other spiritual. He is one head, and he has one body.

We see then that just as those that we call spiritual, or priests, bishops, or Popes do not differ from other Christians in any other or higher degree, but in that they are to be concerned with the word of God, and the sacraments—that being their work and office—in the same way the temporal authorities hold the sword and the rod in their hands to punish the wicked and to protect the good. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—every man has the office and function of his calling, and yet all alike are consecrated priests and bishops, and every man in his office must be useful and beneficial to the rest, that so many kinds of work may all be united into one community: just as the members of the body all serve one another.

Now see, what a Christian doctrine is this, that the temporal authority is not above the clergy and may not punish it. This is, as if one were to say, the hand may not help, though the eye is in grievous suffering. Is it not un-natural, not to say un-Christian, that one member may not help another or guard it against harm? Nay, the nobler the member, the more the rest are bound to help it. Therefore I say forasmuch as the temporal power has been ordained by God for the punishment of the bad, and the protection of the good, therefore we must let it do its duty throughout the whole Christian body, without respect of persons, whether it strike Popes, bishops, priests, monks, or nuns. If it were sufficient reason for fettering the temporal power that it is inferior among the officers of Christianity to the offices of priest or confessor, or to the spiritual estate—if this were so, then we ought to restrain tailors, cobblers, masons, carpenters, cooks, servants, peasants, and all secular workmen from providing the Pope, or bishop, priests, and monks with shoes, clothes, houses, or victuals, or from paying them tithes. But if these laymen are allowed to do their work without restraint, what do the Romanist scribes mean by their laws? They mean that they withdraw themselves from the operation of temporal Christian power, simply in order that they may be free to do evil, and thus fulfill what Saint Peter said, "There shall be false teachers among you... and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you."

Therefore the temporal Christian power must exercise its office without let or hindrance, without considering whom it may strike, whether Pope, or bishop, or priest; whoever is guilty, let him suffer for it. Whatever the ecclesiastical law says in opposition to this is merely the invention of Romanist arrogance.

For this is what Saint Paul says to all Christians, "Let every soul" (I presume including the Popes) "be subject unto the higher powers, for he bears not the sword in vain. For he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that does evil." Also Saint Peter, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake... for so is the will of God." He has also said that men would come who should despise government; as has come to pass through ecclesiastical law....

### The Second Wall

The second wall is even more tottering and weak: that they alone pretend to be considered masters of the Scriptures; although they learn nothing of them all their life, they assume authority and juggle before us with impudent words, saying that the Pope cannot err in matters of faith, whether he be evil or good; albeit they cannot prove it by a single letter. That is why the canon law contains so many heretical and un-Christian, nay, un-natural laws; but of these we need not speak now. For whereas they imagine the Holy Ghost never leaves them, however unlearned and wicked they may be, they grow bold enough to decree whatever they like. But were this true, where were the need and use of the Holy Scriptures? Let us burn them, and content ourselves with the unlearned gentlemen at Rome, in whom the Holy Ghost dwells, who, however, can dwell in pious souls only. If I had not read it, I could never have believed that the Devil should have put forth such follies at Rome and find a following.

But not to fight them with our own words, we will quote Scriptures. Saint Paul says, "If anything be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace." What would be the use of this commandment if we were to believe him alone that teaches or has the highest seat? Christ Himself says, "And they shall be all taught of God." Thus it may come to pass that the Pope and his followers are wicked and not true Christians, and not being taught by God, have no true understanding; whereas a common man may have true understanding. Why should we then not follow him? Has not the Pope often erred? Who could help Christianity, in case the Pope errs, if we do not rather believe another who has the Scriptures for him?

Therefore it is a wickedly devised fable, and they cannot quote a single letter to confirm it, that it is for the Pope alone to interpret the Scriptures or to confirm the interpretation of them; they have assumed the authority of their own selves. And though they say that this authority was given to Saint Peter when the keys were given to him, it is plain enough that the keys were not given to Saint Peter alone, but to the whole community. Besides, the keys were not ordained for doctrine or authority, but for sin, to bind or loose; and what they claim besides this is mere invention. But what Christ said to Saint Peter, "I have

prayed for you, that your faith fail not," cannot relate to the Pope, inasmuch as there have been many Popes without faith, as they are themselves forced to acknowledge. Nor did Christ pray for Peter alone, but for all the Apostles and all Christians, as He says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." Is not this plain enough?...

### The Third Wall

The third wall falls of itself, as soon as the first two have fallen; for if the Pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, we are bound to stand by the Scriptures to punish and to constrain him, according to Christ's commandment; "Moreover if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he shall hear you, you has gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto you as an heathen man and a publican."... Moreover, they can show nothing in the Scriptures giving the Pope sole power to call and confirm councils; they have nothing but their own laws; but these hold good only so long as they are not injurious to Christianity and the laws of God. Therefore, if the Pope deserves punishment, these laws cease to bind us; since Christendom would suffer if he were not punished by a council. Thus we read that the council of the Apostles was not called by Saint Peter, but by all the Apostles and the elders.... Moreover if I consider the councils that the Pope has called, I do not find that they produced any notable results.

Therefore, when need requires and the Pope is a cause of offence to Christendom, in these cases whoever can best do so, as a faithful member of the whole body, must do what he can to procure a true free council. This no one can do so well as the temporal authorities, especially since they are fellow-Christians, fellow-priests, sharing one spirit, and one power in all things; and since they should exercise the office that they have received from God without hindrance, whenever it is necessary and useful that it should be exercised....

But as for their boasts of their authority, that no one must oppose it, this is idle talk. No one in Christendom has any authority to do harm, or to forbid others to prevent harm being done. There is no authority in the Church but for reformation. Therefore if the Pope wished to use his power to prevent the calling of a free council so as to prevent the reformation of the Church, we must not respect him or his power; and if he should begin to excommunicate and fulminate, we must despise this as the ravings of a madman, and trusting in God, excommunicate and repel him as best we may. For this his usurped

power is nothing; he does not possess it, and he is at once overthrown by a text from the Scriptures. For Saint Paul says to the Corinthians, "That God has given us authority for edification and not for destruction." Who will set this text at naught?...

And now I hope we have laid the false, lying specter with which the Romanists have long terrified and stupefied our consciences. And we have shown that, like all the rest of us, they are subject to the temporal sword; that they have no authority to interpret the Scriptures by force without skill; and that they have no power to prevent a council, or to pledge it in accordance with their pleasure, or to bind it beforehand and deprive it of its freedom; and that if they do this, they are verily of the fellowship of Anti-Christ and the Devil, and have nothing of Christ but the name.