

An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility of the German Nation

Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate, 1520
by

Martin Luther (1520)



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Introduction and Translation by C. M. Jacobs

Works of Martin Luther:
With Introductions and Notes

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Proposals for Reform Part III

25. The universities also need a good, thorough reformation -- I must say it no matter whom it vexes -- for everything which the papacy has instituted and ordered is directed only towards the increasing of sin and error. What else are the universities, if their present condition remains unchanged, than as the book of Maccabees says, 2 Macc. 4:9, 12: Gymnasia Epheborum et Graecae gloriae,[1] in which loose living prevails, the Holy Scriptures and the Christian faith are little taught, and the blind, heathen master Aristotle[2] rules alone, even more than Christ. In this regard my advice would be that Aristotle's Physics, Metaphysics, On the Soul, Ethics, which have hitherto been thought his best books, should be altogether discarded, together with all the rest of his books which boast of treating the things of nature, although nothing can be learned from the either of the things of nature or the things of the Spirit. Moreover no one has so far understood his meaning, and many souls have been burdened with profitless labor and study, at the cost of much precious time. I venture to say that any potter has more knowledge of nature than is written in these books. It grieves me to the heart that this damned, conceited, rascally heathen has with his false words deluded and made fools of so many of the best Christians. God has sent him as a plague upon us for our sins.

Why, this wretched man, in his best book, On the Soul, teaches that the soul dies with the body, although many have tried with vain words to save his reputation. As though we had not the Holy Scriptures, in which we are abundantly instructed about all things, and of them Aristotle had not the faintest inkling! And yet this dead heathen has conquered and obstructed and almost suppressed the books of the living God, so that when I think of this miserable business I can believe nothing else than that the evil spirit has introduced the study of Aristotle.

Again, his book on Ethics is the worst of all books. It flatly opposes divine grace and all Christian virtues, and yet it is considered one of his best works. Away with such books! Keep them away from all Christians! Let no one accuse me of exaggeration, or of condemning what I do not understand! My dear friend, I know well whereof I speak. I know my Aristotle as well as you or the likes of you. I have lectured on him[3] and heard lectures on him, and I understand him better than do St. Thomas or Scotus.[4] This I can say without pride, and if necessary I can prove it. I care not that so many great minds have wearied themselves over him for so many hundred years. Such objections do not disturb me as once they did; for it is plain as day that other errors have remained for even more centuries in the world and in the universities.

I should be glad to see Aristotle's books on Logic, Rhetoric and Poetics retained or used in an abridged form as text-books for the profitable training of young people in speaking and preaching. But the commentaries and notes should be abolished, and as Cicero's Rhetoric is read without commentaries and notes, so Aristotle's Logic should be read as it is, without such a mass of comments. But now neither speaking nor preaching is learned from it, and it has become nothing but a disputing and a weariness to the flesh.

Besides this there are the languages -- Latin, Greek and Hebrew -- the mathematical disciplines and history. But all this I give over to the specialists, and, indeed, the reform would come of itself, if we were only seriously bent upon it. In truth, much depends upon it; for it is here[5] that the Christian youth and the best of our people, with whom the future of Christendom lies, are to be educated and trained. Therefore I consider that there is no work more worthy of pope or emperor than a thorough reformation of the universities, and there is nothing worse or more worthy of the devil than unreformed universities.

The medical men I leave to reform their own faculties; the jurists and theologians I take as my share, and I say, in the first place, that it were well if the canon law, from the first letter to the last, and especially the decretals, were utterly blotted out. The Bible contains more than enough directions for all our living, and so the study of the canon law only stands in the way of the study of the Holy Scriptures; moreover, it smacks for the most part of mere avarice and pride. Even though there were much in it that is good, it might as well be destroyed, for the pope has taken the whole canon law captive and imprisoned it in the "chamber of his hear,[6] so that the study of it is henceforth a waste of time and a farce. At present the canon law is not what is in the books, but what is in the sweet will of the pope and his flatterers. Your cause may be thoroughly established in the canon law; still the pope has his *scrinium pectoris*,[7] and all law and the whole world must be guided by that. Now it is oft times a knave, and even the devil himself, who rules this *scrinium*, and they boast that it is ruled by the Holy Spirit! Thus they deal with Christ's unfortunate people. They give them many laws and themselves keep none of them, but others they compel either to keep them or else to buy release.

Since, then, the pope and his followers have suspended the whole canon law, and since they pay no heed to it, but regard their own wanton will as a law exalting them above all the world, we should follow their example and for our part also reject these books. Why should we waste our time studying them? We could never discover the whole arbitrary will of the pope, which has now become the canon law. The canon law has arisen in the devil's name, let it fall in the name of God, and let there be no more *doctores decretorum*[8] in the work, but only *doctores scrinii papalis*, that is, "hypocrites of the pope"! It is said that there is no better temporal rule anywhere than among the Turks, who have neither spiritual nor temporal law, but only their Koran; and we must confess that there is no more shameful rule than among us, with our spiritual and temporal law, so that there is no estate which lives according to the light of nature, still less according to Holy Scripture.

The temporal law, -- God help us! What a wilderness it has become![9] Though it is much better, wiser and more rational than the "spiritual law" which has nothing good about it except the name, still there is far too much of it. Surely the Holy Scriptures and good rulers would be law enough; as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:1: "Is there no one among you can judge his neighbor's cause, that ye must go to law before heathen courts?" It seems just to me that territorial laws and territorial customs should take precedence of the general imperial laws, and the imperial laws be used only in case of necessity. Would to God that as every land has its own peculiar character, so it were ruled by its own brief laws, as the lands were ruled before these imperial laws were invented, and many lands are still ruled without them! These diffuse and far-fetched laws are only a burden to the people, and hinder causes more than they help them. I hope, however, that others have given this matter more thought and attention than I am able to do.

My friends the theologians have spared themselves pains and labor; they leave the Bible in peace and read the Sentences. I should think that the Sentences[10] ought to be the first study of young students in theology and the Bible ought to be the study for the doctors. But now it is turned around; the Bible come first, and is put aside when the bachelor's degree is reached, and the Sentences come last. They are attached forever to the doctorate, and that with such a solemn obligation that a man who is not a priest may indeed read may indeed the Bible, but the Sentences a priest must read. A married man, I observe, could be a Doctor of the Bible, but under no circumstances a Doctor of the Sentences. What good fortune can we expect if we act so perversely and in this way put the Bible, the holy Word of God, so far to the rear? Moreover the pope commands, with many severe words, that his laws are to be read and used in the schools and the courts, but little is said of the Gospel. Thus it is the custom that in the schools and the courts the Gospel lies idle in the dust under the bench,[11] to the end that the pope's

harmful laws may rule alone.

If we are called by the title of teachers[12] of Holy Scripture, then we ought to be compelled, in accordance with our name, to teach the Holy Scriptures and nothing else, although even this title is too proud and boastful and no one ought to be proclaimed and crowned teacher of Holy Scripture. Yet it might be suffered, if the work justified the name; but now, under the despotism of the Sentences, we find among the theologians more of heathen and human opinion than of the holy and certain doctrine of Scripture. What, then, are we to do? I know of no other way than humbly to pray God to give us Doctors of Theology. Pope, emperor and universities may make Doctors of Arts, of Medicine, of Laws, of the Sentences; but be assured that no one will make a Doctor of Holy Scripture, save only the Holy Ghost from heaven, as Christ says in John 6:45: "They must all be taught of God Himself." Now the Holy Ghost does not concern Himself about red or brown birettas[13] or other decorations, nor does He ask whether one is old or young, layman or priest, monk or secular, virgin or married; nay He spake of old by an ass, against the prophet who rode upon it. (Number 22:28). Would God that we were worthy to have such doctors given us, whether they were layman or priests, married or virgin. True, they now try to force the Holy Ghost into pope, bishops and doctors, although there is no sign or indication whatever that He is in them.

The number of theological books must also be lessened, and a selection made of the best of them. For it is not many books or much reading that makes men learned; but it is good things, however little of them, often read, that make men learned in the Scriptures, and make them godly, too. Indeed the writings of all the holy fathers should be read only for a time, in order that through them we may be led to the Holy Scriptures. As it is, however, we read them only to be absorbed in them and never come to the Scriptures. We are like men who study the sign-posts and never travel the road. The dear fathers wished, by their writings, to lead us to the Scriptures, but we so use them as to be led away from the Scriptures, though the Scriptures alone are our vineyard in which we ought to work and toil.

Above all, the foremost and most general subject of study, both in the higher and the lower schools, should be the Holy Scriptures, and for the young boys the Gospel. And would to God that every town had a girl's school also, in which the girls were taught the Gospel for an hour each day either in German or Latin. Indeed the schools, monasteries and nunneries began long ago with that end in view, and it was a praiseworthy and Christian purpose, as we learn from the story of St. Agnes[14] and other of the saints. That was the time of holy virgins and martyrs, and then it was well with Christendom; but now they[15] have come to nothing but praying and singing. Ought not every Christian at his ninth or tenth year to know the entire holy Gospel from which he derives his name[16] and his life? A spinner or a seamstress teaches her daughter the trade in her early years; but now even the great, learned prelates and bishops themselves do not know the Gospel.

O how unjustly we deal with these poor young people who are committed to us for direction and instruction! We must give a terrible accounting for our neglect to set the Word of God before them. They fare as Jeremiah says in Lamentations 2:11 ff.: "Mine eyes are grown weary with weeping, my bowels are terrified, my liver is poured out upon the ground, because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, for the youth and the children perish in all the streets of the whole city; they said to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine? And they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city and gave up the ghost in their mothers' bosom." This pitiful evil we do not see, -- how even now the young folk in the midst of Christendom languish and perish miserably for want of the Gospel, in which we ought to be giving them constant instruction and training.

Moreover, if the universities were diligent in the study of Holy Scripture, we should not send everybody there, as we do when all we ask is numbers, and everyone wishes to have a doctor's degree; but we should send only the best qualified students, who have previously been well trained in the lower schools. A prince or city council ought to see to this, and permit only the well qualified to be sent. But where the Holy Scriptures do not rule, there I advise no one to send his son. Everyone not unceasingly busy with the Word of God must become corrupt; that is why the people who are in the universities and who are trained there are the kind of people they are. For this no one is to blame with the training of the youth. For the universities ought to turn out only men who are experts in the Holy Scriptures, who can become bishops and priests, leaders in the fight against heretics, the devil and all the world. But where do you find this true? I greatly fear that the universities are wide gates of hell, if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scriptures and impress them on the youth.

26. [17]I know full well that the Roman crowd will make pretensions and great boasts about how the pope took the Holy Roman Empire from the Greek Emperor[18] and bestowed it on the Germans, for which honor and benevolence he is said to have justly deserved and obtained from the Germans submission and thanks and all good things. For this reason they will, perhaps, undertake to throw to the winds all attempts to reform them, and will not allow us to think about anything but the bestowal of the Roman Empire. For this cause they have heretofore persecuted and oppressed many a worthy emperor so arbitrarily and arrogantly that it is pity to tell of it, and with the same adroitness they have made themselves overlords of all the temporal powers and authorities, contrary to the Holy Gospel. Of this too I must therefore speak.

There is no doubt that the true Roman Empire, which the writings of the prophets foretold in Numbers 24:24 and in Daniel 2:39 ff., has long since been overthrown and brought to an end, as Balaam clearly prophesied in Numbers 24:24:, when he said: "The Romans shall come and overthrow the Jews; and afterwards they also shall be destroyed." That was brought to pass by the Goths,[19] but especially when the Turkish Empire arose almost a thousand years ago,[20] then in time Asia and Africa fell away, and finally Venice arose, and there remained to Rome nothing of its former power.

Now when the pope could not subdue to his arrogant will the Greeks and the emperor at Constantinople, who was hereditary Roman Emperor, he bethought himself of this device, viz., to rob him of his empire and his title and turn it over to the Germans, who were at that time warlike and of good repute, so as to bring the power of the Roman Empire under his control and give it away as a fief. So too it turned out. It was taken away from the emperor at Constantinople and its name and title were given to us Germans. Thereby we became the servants of the pope, and there is now a second Roman Empire, which the pope has built upon the Germans; for the other, which was first, has long since fallen, as I have said.

So then the Roman See has its will. It has taken possession of Rome, driven out the German Emperor and bound him with oaths not to dwell at Rome. He is to be Roman Emperor, and yet he is not to have possession of Rome, and besides he is at all times to be dependent upon the caprice of the pope and his followers, so that we have the name and they have the land and cities. hey have always abused our simplicity to serve their own arrogance and tyranny, and they call us mad Germans, who let ourselves be made apes and fools at their bidding.

Ah well! For God the Lord it is a small thing to toss empires and principalities to and fro! He is so generous with then that once in a while He gives a kingdom to a knave and takes it from a good man, sometimes by the treachery of wicked, faithless men and sometimes by heredity, as we read of the

Kingdoms of Persia and Greece, and of almost all kingdoms; and Daniel 2:21 and 4:14 says: "He Who ruleth over all things dwelleth in heaven, and it is He alone Who changeth kingdoms, tosseth them to and fro, and maketh them." Since, therefore, no one can think it a great thing to have a kingdom given him, especially if he is a Christian, we Germans too cannot be puffed up because a new Roman Empire is bestowed on us; for in His eyes it is a trifling gift, which He often gives to the most unworthy, as Daniel 4:35 says: "All who dwell upon the earth are in His eyes as nothing, and He has power in all the kingdoms of men, to give them to whomsoever He will."

But although the pope unjustly and by violence robbed the true emperor of his Roman Empire, or of its name, and gave it to us Germans, it is certain, nevertheless, that in this matter God has used the pope's wickedness to give such an empire to the German nation, and after the fall of the first Roman Empire, to set up another, which still exists. And although we gave no occasion to this wickedness of the popes, and did not understand their false aims and purposes, nevertheless, through this papal trickery and roguery, we have already paid too dearly for our empire, with incalculable bloodshed, with the suppression of our liberty, with the risk of robbery of all our goods, especially the goods of the churches and canonries, and with the suffering of unspeakable deception and insult. We have the name of the empire, but the pope has our wealth, honor, body, life, soul and all that is ours. So we Germans are to be cheated in the trade.[21] What the popes sought was to be emperors, and since they could not manage that, they at least succeeded in setting themselves over the emperors.

Because then, the empire has been given us without our fault, by the providence of God and the plotting of evil men, I would not advise that we give it up, but rather that we rule it wisely and in the fear of God, so long as it shall please Him. For, as has been said, it matters not to Him where an empire comes from; it is His will that it shall be ruled. Though the popes took it dishonestly from others, nevertheless we did not get it dishonestly. It is given us by the will of God through evil-minded men; and we have more regard for God's will than for the treacherous purpose of the popes, who, in bestowing it, wished to be emperors themselves, and more than emperors, and only to fool and mock us with the name. The King of Babylon also seized his empire by robbery and force; yet it was God's will that it should be ruled by the holy princes, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael; much more then is it His will that this empire be ruled by the Christian princes of Germany, regardless whether the pope stole it, or got it by robbery, or made it anew. It is all God's ordering, which came to pass before we knew of it.

Therefore the pope and his followers may not boast that they have done a great favor to the German nation by the bestowal of this Roman Empire. First, because they did not mean it for our good, but were rather taking advantage of our simplicity in order to strengthen themselves in their proud designs against the Roman Emperor at Constantinople, from whom the pope godlessly and lawlessly took this empire, a thing which he had no right to do. Second, because the pope's intention was not to give us the empire, but to get it for myself, that he might bring all our power, our freedom, wealth, body and soul into subjection to himself and use us (if God had not prevented) to subdue all the world. He clearly says so himself in his decretals, and he has attempted it, by many evil wiles, with a number of the German emperors. How beautifully we Germans have been taught our German! When we thought to be lords, we became slaves of the most deceitful tyrants; we have the name, title and insignia of the empire, but the pope has its treasures, its authority, its law and its liberty. So the pope gobbles the kernel, and we play with the empty hulls.

Now may God, Who by the wiles of tyrants has tossed this empire into our lap, and charged us with the ruling of it, help us to live up to the name, title and insignia, to rescue our liberty, and to show the Romans, for once, what it is that we, through them, have received from God! They boast that they have

bestowed on us an empire. So be it, then! If it is true, then let the pope give us Rome and everything else which he has got from the empire; let him free our land from his intolerable taxing and robbing, and give us back our liberty, authority, wealth, honor, body and soul; let the empire be what an empire should be, and let his words and pretensions be fulfilled!

If he will not do that, they why all this shamming, these false and lying words and juggler's tricks? Is he not satisfied with having so rudely led this noble nation by the nose these many hundred years without ceasing? It does not follow that the pope must be above an emperor because he makes or crowns him. The prophet Samuel at God's command anointed and crowned Kings Saul and David, and yet he was their subject (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13); and the prophet Nathan anointed King Solomon, but was not set over him on that account (1 Kings 1:38 f.); Elisha too had one of his servants anoint Jehu King of Israel, and yet they remained obedient and subject to him (2 Kings 9:1 ff.). Except in the case of the pope, it has never happened in all the world's history that he who consecrated or crowned the king was over the king. He lets himself be crowned pope by three cardinals, who are under him, and he is nevertheless their superior. Why then should he, contrary to the example which he himself sets, and contrary to the custom and teaching of all the world and of the Scriptures, exalt himself above temporal authorities, or the empire, simply because he crowns or consecrates the emperor? It is enough that he should be the emperor's superior in divine things, to wit, in preaching, teaching and administering the sacraments, in which things, indeed, any bishop or priest is over every other man, as St. Ambrose in his See was over the emperor Theodosius,[22] and the prophet Nathan over David, and Samuel over Saul. Therefore, let the German Emperor be really and truly emperor, and let not his authority or his sword be put down by this blind pretension of papal hypocrites, as though they were to be excepted from his dominion and themselves direct the temporal sword in all things.

27. Enough has now been said about the failings of the clergy, though more of them can and will be found if these are properly considered. We would say something too about the failings of the temporal estate.

1. There is great need of a general law and decree of the German nation against the extravagance and excess in dress, by which so many nobles and rich men are impoverished.[23] God has given to us, as to other lands, enough wool, hair, flax and everything else which properly serves for the seemly and honorable dress of every rank, so that we do not need to spend and waste such enormous sums for silk and velvet and golden ornaments and other foreign wares. I believe that even if the pope had not robbed us Germans with his intolerable exactions, we should still have our hands more than full with these domestic robbers, the silk and velvet merchants.[24] In the matter of clothes, as we see, everybody wants to be equal to everybody else, and pride and envy are aroused and increased among us, as we deserve. All this and much more misery would be avoided if our curiosity would only let us be thankful, and be satisfied with the goods which God has given us.

2. In like manner it is also necessary to restrict the spice-traffic[25] which is another of the great ships in which money is carried out of German lands. There grows among us, by God's grace, more to eat and drink than in any other land, and just as choice and good. Perhaps the proposals that I make may seem foolish and impossible and give the impression that I want to suppress the greatest of all trades, that of commerce; but I am doing what I can. If reforms are not generally introduced, then let every one who is willing reform himself. I do not see that many good customs have ever come to a land through commerce, and in ancient times God made His people of Israel dwell away from the sea on this account, and did not let them engage much in commerce.

3. But the greatest misfortune of the German nation is certainly the traffic in annuities[26]. If that did not exist many a man would have to leave unbought his silk, velvets, golden ornaments, spices and ornaments of every sort. It has not existed much over a hundred years, and has already brought almost all princes, cities, endowed institutions, nobles and their heirs to poverty, misery and ruin; if it shall continue for another hundred years Germany cannot possibly have a pfennig left and we shall certainly have to devour one another. The devil invented the practice, and the pope, by confirming it,[27] has injured the whole world.

Therefore I ask and pray that everyone open his eyes to see the ruin of himself, his children and his heirs, which not only stands before the door, but already haunts the house, and that emperor, princes, lords and cities do their part that this trade be condemned as speedily as possible, and henceforth prevented, regardless whether or not the pope, with all his law and unlaw, is opposed to it, and whether or not benefices or church foundations are based upon it. It is better that there should be in a city one living based on an honest freehold or revenue, than a hundred based on an annuity; indeed a living based on an annuity is worse and more grievous than twenty based on freeholds. In truth this traffic in rents must be a sign and symbol that the world, for its grievous sins, has been sold to the devil, so that both temporal and spiritual possessions must fail us, and yet we do not notice it at all.

Here, too, we must put a bit in the mouth of the Fuggers and similar corporations;[29] and that, too, by another way than agriculture or cattle- raising, in which increase of wealth depends not on human wits, but on God's blessing. I commend this to the men of affairs. I am a theologian, and find nothing to blame in it except its evil and offending appearance, of which St. Paul says, 1 Thess. 5:22: "Avoid every appearance or show of evil." This I know well, that it would be much more pleasing to God if we increased agriculture and diminished commerce, and that they do much better who, according to the Scriptures, till the soil and seek their living from it, as was said to us and to all men in Adam, Gen. 3:17 ff.: "Accursed be the earth when thou laborest therein, it shall bear thee thistles and thorns, and in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread." There is still much land lying untilled.

4. Next comes the abuse of eating and drinking[30] which gives us Germans a bad reputation in foreign lands, as though it were our special vice. Preaching cannot stop it; it has become too common, and has got too firmly the upper hand. The waste of money which it causes would be a small thing, were it not followed by other sins, -- murder, adultery, stealing, irreverence and all the vices. The temporal sword can do something to prevent it; or else it will be as Christ says: Luke 21:34 f.: "The last day shall come like a secret snare, when they shall be eating and drinking, marrying and wooing, building and planting, buying and selling." It is so much like that now that I verily believe the judgment day is at the door, though men are thinking least of all about it.

5. Finally is it not a pitiful thing that we Christians should be maintain among us open and common houses of prostitution, though all of us are baptized unto chastity? I know very well what some say to this, to wit, that it is not the custom of any one people, that it is hard to break up, that it is better that there should be such houses than that married women, or maidens, or those of more honorable estate should be outraged. But should not the temporal, Christian government consider that in this heathen way the evil is not to be controlled? If the people of Israel could exist without such an abomination, why could not Christian people do as much? Nay, how do many cities, towns and villages exist without such houses? Why should not great cities exist without them?

In this, and in the other matters above mentioned, I have tried to point out how many good works the temporal government could do, and what should be the duty of every government, to the end that every

one may learn what an awful responsibility it is to rule, and to have high station. What good would it do that an overlord were in his own life as holy as St. Peter, if he have not the purpose diligently to help his subjects in these matters? His very authority will condemn him! For it is the duty of the authorities to seek the highest good of their subjects. But if the authorities were to consider how the young people might be brought together in marriage, the hope of entering the married state would greatly help every one to endure and to resist temptation.

But now every man is drawn to the priesthood or the monastic life, and among them, I fear, there is not one in a hundred who has any other reason than that he seeks a living, and doubts that he will ever be able to support himself in the estate of matrimony. Therefore they live wildly enough beforehand, and wish, as they say, to "wear out their lust," but rather wear it in,[31] as experience shows. I find the proverb true, "Despair makes most of the monks and priests"[32]; and so things are as we see them.

My faithful counsel is that, in order to avoid many sins which have become very common, neither boy nor maid should take the vow of chastity, or of the "spiritual life," before the age of thirty years.[33] It is, as St. Paul says, a peculiar gift. Therefore let him whom God does not constrain (1 Cor. 7:7), put off becoming a cleric and taking the vows. Nay, I will go farther and say, If you trust God so little that you are not willing to support yourself as a married man, and wish to become a cleric only because of this distrust, then for the sake of your own soul, I beg of you not to become a cleric, but rather a farmer, or whatever else you please. For if to obtain your temporal support you must have one measure of trust in God, you must have ten measures of trust to continue in the life of cleric. If you do not trust God to support you in the world, how will you trust him to support you in the Church? Alas, unbelief and distrust spoil everything and lead us into all misery, as we see in every estate of life!

Much could be said of this miserable condition. The young people have no one to care for them. They all do as they please, and the government is of as much use to them as if it did not exist; and yet this should be the chief concern of pope, bishops, lords and councils. They wish to rule far and wide, and yet to help on one. O, what a rare bird will a lord and ruler be in heaven just on this account, even though he build a hundred churches for God and raise up all the dead!

[Let this suffice for this time! Of what the temporal powers and the nobility ought to do, I think I have said enough in the little book, *On Good Works*. [34] There is room for improvement in their lives and in their rule, and yet the abuses of the temporal power are not to be compared with those of the spiritual power, as I have there shown.] [35]

I think too that I have pitched my song in a high key, have made many propositions which will be thought impossible and have attacked many things too sharply. But what am I to do? I am in duty bound to speak. If I were able, these are the things I should wish to do. I prefer the wrath of the world to the wrath of God; they can do no more than take my life.[36] Many times heretofore I have made overtures of peace to my opponents; but as I now see, God has through them compelled me to open my mouth wider and wider and give them enough to say, bark, shout and write, since they have nothing else to do. Ah well, I know another little song about Rome and about them! [37] If their ears itch for it I will sing them that sing too, and pitch the notes to the top of the scale. Understandest thou, dear Rome, what I mean?

I have many times offered my writings for investigation and judgment, but it has been of no use. To be sure, I know that if my cause is just, it must be condemned on earth, and approved only by Christ in heaven; for all the Scriptures show that the cause of Christians and of Christendom must be judged by

God alone. Such a cause has never yet been approved by men on earth, but the opposition has always been too great and strong. It is my greatest care and fear that my cause may remain uncondemned, by which I should know for certain that it was not yet pleasing to God.

Therefore let them boldly go to work, -- pope, bishop, priest, monk and scholar! They are the right people to persecute the truth, as they have ever done.

God give us all a Christian mind, and especially to the Christian nobility of the German nation a right spiritual courage to do the best that can be done for the poor Church. Amen.

Wittenberg, 1520.

NOTES:

[1] Places for training youths in Greek glory.

[2] The philosophy of Aristotle dominated the mediaeval universities. It not only provided the forms in which theological and religious truth came to expression, but it was the basis of all scientific study in every department. The man who did not know Aristotle was an ignoramus.

[3] Or, "I have read him." Luther's *lesen* allows of either interpretation.

[4] Duns Scotus, died 1308. In the XV and XVI Centuries he was regarded as the rival of Thomas Aquinas for first place among the theological teachers of the Church.

[5] i.e., In the universities.

[6] See above, pp. 94 f.

[7] i.e., "The chamber of his heart." Boniface VIII (1294-1303) had decreed, *Romanus Pontifex jura omnia in scrinio pectoris sui censetur habere*, "the Roman pontiff has all laws in the chamber of his heart." This decree was received into the canon law (c. I, de const. In VI to (I, 2)).

[8] *Doctores decretorum*, "Doctor of Decrees," an academic degree occasionally given to professors of Canon Law *doctor scrinii papalis*, "Doctor of the Papal Heart."

[9] The introduction of Roman law into Germany, as the accepted law of the empire, had begun in the XII Century. With the decay of the feudal system and the increasing desire of the rulers to provide their government with some effective legal system, its application became more widespread, until by the end of the XV Century it was the accepted system of the empire. The attempt to apply this ancient law to conditions utterly different from those of the time when it was formulated, and the continual conflict between the Roman law, the feudal customs and the remnants of Germanic legal ideas, naturally gave rise to a state of affairs which Luther could justly speak of as "a wilderness."

[10] "Sentences" (*Sententiae, libri sententiarum*) was the title of the text-books in theology. Theological instruction was largely by way of comment on the most famous book of Sentences, that of Peter Lombard.

[11] Cf. Vol. 1, p. 7.

[12] i.e., Doctors.

[13] The head-dress of the doctors.

[14] See above, p. 118, note 2.

[15] i.e., The monasteries and nunneries.

[16] i.e., The name of Christian.

[17] This section did not appear in the first edition; see Introduction, p. 59.

[18] Charles the Great, King of the Franks, was crowned Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III in the year 800 AD. He was a German, but regarded himself successor to the line of emperors who had ruled at Rome. The fiction was fostered by the popes, and the German kings, after receiving the papal coronation, were called Roman Emperors. From this came the name of the German Empire of the Middle Ages, "the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation." The popes of the later Middle Ages claimed that the bestowal of the imperial dignity lay in the power of the pope, and Pope Clement V (1313) even claimed that in the event of a vacancy the pope was the possessor of the imperial power (cf. above, p. 109). On the whole subject see BRYCE, *Holy Roman Empire*, 2d ed. (1904), and literature there cited.

[19] The city of Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410.

[20] Luther is characteristically careless about his chronology. By the "Turkish Empire" he means the Mohammed power.

[21] So sol man die Deutschen teuschen und mit teuschen teuschenn, i.e., made Germans (Deutsche) by cheating (teuschen) them.

[22] See *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, I (1911), pp. 244 f.

[23] Such a law as Luther here suggests was proposed to the Diet of Worms (1521). Text in WREDE, *Reichstagsakten*, II, 335-341.

[24] Cf. Luther's Sermon von Kaufbandlung und Wuche of 1524. (Weim. Ed. XV, pp. 293 ff.)

[25] Spices were one of the chief articles of foreign commerce in the XVI Century. The discovery of the cape-route to India had given the Portuguese a practical monopoly of this trade. A comparative statement of the cost of spices for a period of years was reported to the Diet of Nurnberg (1523). See WREDE, *op. cit.*, III, 576.

[26] The Zinskauf or Rentenkauf was a means for evading the prohibition of usury. The buyer purchased an annuity, but the purchase price was not regarded as a loan, for it could not be recalled, and the annual payments could not therefore be called interest.

[27] The practice was legalized by the Lateran Council, 1512.

[28] The XVI Century was the hey-day of the great trading-companies, among which the Fuggers of Augsburg (see above, p. 97, note 5) easily took first place. The effort of these companies was directed toward securing monopolies in the staple articles of commerce, and their ability to finance large enterprises made it possible for them to gain practical control of the home markets. The sharp rise in the cost of living which took place on the first half of the XVI Century was laid at their door. The Diet of Cologne (1522) had passed a stringent law against monopolies the subject (WREDE, Reichstagsakten, II, pp. 355 ff.) "in somewhat heated language" (ibid., 842), but failed to agree upon methods of suppression. The subject was discussed again at the Diet of Nurnberg (1523) and various remedies were proposed (ibid., III, 556-599).

[29] The profits of the trading-companies were enormous. The 9 percent annually of the Welser (EHRENBERG, Zeitalter der Fugger, I, 195), pales into insignificance beside the 1634 percent by which the fortune of the Fuggers grew in twenty-one years (SCHULTE, Die Fugger in Rom, I, 3). In 1511 a certain Bartholomew Rem invested 900 gulden in the Hochstetter company of Augsburg; by 1517 he claimed 33,000 gulden profit. The company was willing to settle at 26,000 and the resulting litigation caused the figures to become public (WREDE, op. cit., II, 842, note 4; III pp. 574 f.). On Luther's view of capitalism see ECK, Introduction to the Sermon von Kaufshandlung und Wucher, in Berl. Ed., VII, 494-513.

[30] The Diets of Augsburg (1500) and Cologne (1512) had passed edicts against drunkenness. A committee of the Diet of Worms (1521) recommended that these earlier edicts be reaffirmed (WREDE, op. cit., II, pp. 343f.), but the Diet adjourned without acting on the recommendation (ibid., 737) Vol. II-11

[31] Sie wollen ausbuben, so sich's vielmehr hineinbubt.

[32] Cf. MULLER, Luther's theol. Quellen, 1912, ch. I.

[33] In the Conitendi Ratio Luther had set the age for men at eighteen to twenty, for the women at fifteen to sixteen years. See Vol. I, p. 100.

[34] Translated in this edition, Vol. I, pp. 184 ff.; see especially pp. 266 ff.

[35] These sentences did not appear in the first edition.

[36] See Letter to Staupitz, Vol. I, p. 43.

[37] This "little song" is the Prelude on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church. See below, pp. 170 ff.

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