

# Necessity of Reforming the Church 3 of 4 (1544)

by John Calvin

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*John Calvin emphasizes the necessity of reforming the church, condemning hypocrisy, will-worship, and the abuse of sacraments, and calling for true devotion to God and the defense of true liberty of conscience.*

**Duration:** 1:31:07

**Scripture:** Isaiah 29:13, Jeremiah 7:4, Jeremiah 7:11

**Topics:** "Church Authority", "Gospel Unity"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the primacy of the Romish sea, which refers to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The speaker acknowledges that the adversaries of the Church have good reason to maintain this primacy, as they believe their dependence lies in it. However, the speaker argues that this supremacy was established by the will of man, not divine authority. The speaker emphasizes the importance of unity in adhering to God and the Gospel as the only rule of a good and holy life. The speaker also addresses the accusation that the preaching of the Gospel leads to licentiousness, arguing that it is not the fault of the ministers of the Gospel but rather the result of individuals' rejection of God's authority.

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## Transcript

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If you do not have a web connection, please request a free printed catalogue. The Necessity of Reforming the Church Presented to the Imperial Diet at Spire, A.D. 1544 In the name of all who wish Christ to reign. By John Calvin As read by Samantha Ellosite Take 3 The mockery which worships God with naught but external gestures and absurd human fiction, how could we without sin allow to pass unrebuked? We know how much he hates hypocrisy, and yet in that fictitious worship which was everywhere in use, hypocrisy reigned.

We hear how bitter the terms in which the prophets invade against all worship, fabricated by human rashness. But a good intention, that is, an insane license of daring whatever man pleased, was deemed the perfection of worship. For it is certain that in the whole body of worship which had been established, there was scarcely a single observance which had an authoritative sanction from the word of God.

We are not in this matter to stand either by our own or by other men's judgment. We must listen to the voice of God, and hear in what estimation He holds that profanation of worship which is displayed when men, overleaping the boundaries of His word, run riot in their own invention. The reasons which He assigns for punishing the Israelites with blindness after they had lost the pious and holy discipline of the church, are two.

That is, the prevalence of hypocrisy and will-worship, meaning thereby a form of worship contrived by man. For as much, saith He, as the people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men. Therefore I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder.

For the wisdom of the wise men shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent men shall be hid. Isaiah 29 verse 13 and 14 When God stirred us up, a similar or worse perversity openly domineered throughout the church. While God then was thundering from heaven, were we to sit quiet? Perhaps they will consider as a trivial error the custom which prevailed, in defiance of the clear prohibition of God, of repeating the public prayers in an unknown tongue.

But since it is manifest that by such procedure God was mocked, they cannot deny that we had too good cause to object to it. Then what shall I say of the blasphemies which rung in the public hymn, and which no pious man is able to hear without the utmost horror? We all know the epithets which they applied to Mary, styling her the gate of heaven, hope, life, and salvation, and to such a degree of infatuation and madness had they proceeded, that they even gave her a right to order Christ. For still in many churches is heard the execrable and impious stanza, Ask the Father, command the Son.

In terms in no respect more modest do they celebrate certain of the saints, and these too saints of their own making, that is, individuals whom they on their own judgment have admitted into the catalogue of saints. For among all the multitudes of praises which they sing to Claude, they call him the light of the blind, the guide of the erring, the life and resurrection of the dead. The forms of prayers in daily use are stuffed with similar blasphemies.

The Lord denounces the severest threatenings against those who, either in oaths or prayers, confounded his name with Balaam. What vengeance then impends over our heads when we not only confound him with saints as minor gods, but with signal insult rob Christ of the proper and peculiar titles with which he is distinguished, in order that we may bestow them on creatures? Were we to be silent here also, and by perfidious silence call down on ourselves his heavy judgments? I say nothing of the fact that no man prayed, and that indeed no man could pray to God with firm faith, that is, in good earnest. For Christ being in a manner buried, the necessary consequence was that men were always in doubt whether God had a father's kindness toward them, whether he was disposed to assist them, and whether he took any interest in their salvation.

What? Was it an error, either trivial or tolerable, when the eternal priesthood of Christ, as if it had been set up to be prayed upon, was bestowed without distinction on any individual among the saints? Let us remember that Christ by his death purchased for himself the honor of being the eternal advocate and

peacemaker to present our prayers and our persons to the Father, to obtain supplies of grace for us, and enable us to hope we shall obtain what we ask. As he alone died for us and redeemed us by his death, so he admits of no partnership in this honor. Therefore, what fouler blasphemy than that which is ever and anon in the mouths of our opponents, that is, that Christ is indeed the only mediator of redemption, but that all the saints are mediators of intercession? Is not Christ in this way left inglorious? As if, after having once in his death performed the office of the priest, he had ever after resigned in the it to the saints.

Are we then to be silent when the peculiar dignity of Christ, the dignity which cost him such a price, is wrested from him with the greatest contumely and distributed among the saints, as if it were lawful spoil? But it seems that when they speak thus, they do not deny that Christ intercedes for us even now. Only we are to understand that he does it along with the saints, that is, just as any other one in the catalogue. It must have been a mighty honor which Christ purchased for himself by his blood, if all he obtained was to be the associate of Hugo, Lubin, or some of the merest dregs of saintship which the Roman pontiff has conferred at his own pleasure.

For the question is not whether the saints even do pray, this being a subject of which it is better to have no knowledge as Scripture does not mention it, but the question is whether after passing by Christ or treating him with neglect or positively abandoning him altogether, we are entitled to look around for the patronage of saints, or, if they will have it in plainer terms, whether Christ is the only priest who opens up an asylum for us in heaven, leads us thither by the hand, and by his intercession inclines the Father to listen to our prayers, so that we ought to cast ourselves entirely on his advocacy and present our prayers in his name, or whether, on the contrary, he holds his office in common with the saints. I have shown above that Christ was in a great measure defrauded, not of the honor of the priesthood merely, but also of the gratitude due for his benefits. True, he is called a redeemer, but in a manner which implies that men also by their own free will redeem themselves from the bondage of sin and death.

True, he is called righteousness and salvation, but so that men still procure salvation for themselves by the merit of their works. For this inestimable gift which no eloquence of men or angels is able adequately to describe, the schoolmen are not ashamed to restrict, telling us that though he confers the first merit, that is, as they explain it, the occasion of meriting, yet after receiving this help we merit eternal life by our works. True, they confess that we are washed from our sins by the blood of Christ, but so that every individual cleanses himself by washings elsewhere obtained.

True, the death of Christ receives the name of a sacrifice, but so that sins are expiated by the daily sacrifices of men. True, Christ is said to have reconciled us to the Father, but with this reservation, that men, by their own satisfaction, buy off the punishments which they owe to the justice of God. When supplementary aid is sought from the benefit of the keys, no more honor is paid to Christ than to Cyprian or Cyrus.

For in making up the treasury of the church, the merits of Christ and of martyrs are thrown together in the slump. In all these things have we not just as many execrable blasphemies as we have words, blasphemies by which the glory of Christ is rent and torn to shreds? For being in a great measure despoiled of his honor, he retains the name while he wants the power. Here too, no doubt, we might have been silent, though we saw the Son, on whom the Father had bestowed all authority and power and glory, and whom alone he did thus glory, so classified with his servants that he had scarcely any preeminence above them.

When we saw his benefits thus in oblivion, when we saw his virtue destroyed by the ingratitude of men, when we saw the price of his blood held in no estimation, and the fruits of his death almost annihilated, when in fine we saw him so deformed by fulsome profane opinions that he had more resemblance to an unsubstantial phantom than to himself, did it behoove us to bear it calmly and silently? O accursed patience! If when the honor of God is impaired, not to say prostrated, we are so slightly affected that we can wink and pass on. O ill-bestowed benefits of Christ! If we can permit the memory of them to be thus suppressed by impious blasphemies. I again return to the second branch of Christian doctrine.

Who can deny that men are laboring under a kind of delirium when they suppose that they procure eternal life by the merit of their works? I admit that they conjoin the grace of God with their works, but inasmuch as their confidence of obtaining acceptance is made to depend on their own worthiness, it is clear that the ground of their confidence in boasting lies in their works. The trite and favorite doctrine of the schools, the opinion deeply seated in almost all minds, is that every individual is loved by God in exact proportion to his deserts. Entertaining this view are not souls, by means of a confidence which the devil inspires, raised to a height from which, as from a loftier precipice, they are afterwards plunged into the gulf of despair.

Again, when they pretend to merit the favor of God, it is not merely by true obedience, but by frivolous observances of no value. The meritorious works to which the first place is assigned are these, to mumble over a multitude of little prayers, to erect altars and place statues or pictures thereon, to frequent churches and run up and down from one church to another, to hear many masses and to buy some, to wear out their bodies by I know not what abstinences, abstinences having nothing in common with Christian fasting, and in particular to be most careful in observing the traditions of men. In the matter of satisfaction, is it not even a greater infatuation which makes them, after the manner of the heathens set out in quest of expiation, by which they may reconcile themselves to God? After all these attempts, after great and long fatigue, what did they gain? Doing everything with a dubious and trembling conscience, they were always exposed to that fearful anxiety, or rather that dire torment of which I have already spoken, because they were enjoined to doubt whether their persons and their works were not hateful to God.

Confidence being in this way overthrown, the necessary consequence was, as Paul declares, that the promise of the eternal inheritance was made void. In such circumstances, what became of the salvation of men? Where there was such necessity for speaking, had we kept silent, we should have been not only ungrateful and treacherous towards God, but also cruel towards men over whom we saw eternal destruction impending, unless they were brought back into the proper path. Were a dog to see an injury offered to his master, equal to the insult which is offered to God in the sacraments, he would instantly bark and expose his own life to danger, sooner than silently allow his master to be so insulted.

Ought we to show less devotedness to God than a brute is wont to show to men? I say nothing of the fact that rights founded merely on human authority have been put on a footing with the mysteries instituted by Christ and recommended by His divine authority, though the procedure is deserving of the severest rebuke. But when the mysteries themselves were thus corrupted by the many superstitions and dishonored by the many false opinions to which we have already adverted for base and filthy lucre, ought we to have dissembled and borne it, or pretended not to see it? Christ, with a whip that drove the money changers out of the temple, threw down their tables and scattered their merchandise. I admit it is not lawful for every man to take the whip into his own hand, but it is incumbent on all who professedly belong to Christ to burn with the zeal with which Christ was animated when He vindicated the glory of His Father.

Therefore, that profanation of the temple at which He, in a manner so marked, expressed His strong displeasure, it is at least our part to condemn in a free, firm, and decided tone. Who is ignorant that sacraments have now for a long time been sold in churches, as openly as the wares which stand exposed in the public market? Other rites too have their fixed price, while as to some a bargain is not struck till after long higgling. But since the instances which are exhibited in the Lord's Supper are manifest, and of a nature more heinous than in the case of other rites, come and say with what conscience we could have connived at profanations of it at once so numerous and so blasphemous.

Seeing that even now I want words to express them, with what justice are we charged with excessive vehemence in inveighing against them? By the sacred body of Christ which hung in sacrifice for us, by the holy blood which He shed for our ablution, I here beseech Your Imperial Majesty, and you, most illustrious princes, that you will be pleased seriously to consider how great must be the mystery in which that body is set before us for meat, and that blood for drink, to consider how carefully, how religiously it ought to be kept unpolluted. What ungratitude then must it be when this heavenly mystery, which Christ has committed to us like a most precious jewel, is trodden under feet of swine, for any man to look on and be silent? For we may see it not only trodden, but also defiled by every species of pollution. What an insult was offered when the efficacy of Christ's death was transferred to a theatrical performance by men, when some priestling, as if he had been the successor of Christ, interposed himself as a mediator between God and man, when, after destroying the virtue of the only sacrifice, a thousand sacrifices of expiation were daily offered in a single city, when Christ was sacrificed a thousand times a day, as if He had not done enough in once dying for us.

In heaping all these insults upon Christ, they abuse the character of the Holy Supper, for they are all included in this single notion of sacrifice. I am not ignorant of the glosses which our opponents employ in order to screen their absurdities. Up to the present age, they impudently practiced all the abominations to which I have referred.

But now, being detected, they burrow in new holes without being able, however, to hide their turpitude. They talk that the Mass was a sacrifice by which the sins not only of the living but also of the dead were expiated. What do they now gain by quibbling, except it be to betray their impudence? How deeply, too, is the sacrament polluted when, instead of the open preaching of the Word, which constitutes its legitimate consecration, a charm is wrought with the bread by means of whiffs and whispers? When, instead of being distributed among the assembly of the faithful, it is devoured apart by one man or set aside for another's use? And when, even in the case where a kind of distribution is made, the people are, in defiance of the clear injunction of our Lord, defrauded of the half, I mean the cup? What delirium to fancy that by their exercises the substance of bread is transmuted into Christ? How shameful to see a trade in masses plied as unblushingly as a trade in shoes.

For if it is true, as they say, that the thing they vend is the merit of Christ's death, the insult which they offer to Christ is not less gross than if they sat in his face. Be pleased, most invincible emperor and most illustrious princes, to call to mind the disaster which of old befell the Corinthians on account of one and that not at first sight so very heinous an abuse of this sacrament. Each brought from home his own supper, not as a common contribution, but that the rich might feast luxuriantly while the poor hungered.

For this cause the Lord chastised them with a severe and deadly pestilence. Such is the account of Paul, who at the same time bints us regarded as a paternal rod by which the Lord called them to repentance. From this infer what we have at this day to expect, who have not declined merely in some little iota from

the genuine institution of Christ, but wandered to an immeasurable distance from it.

Who have not only corrupted its purity in one instance, but defaced it in numerous instances, and these too of a shocking description. Who have not merely interfered with its legitimate end by some single abuse, but perverted its whole administration. Nor can it be doubted that now for some time God has begun to avenge this impiety.

Now for many years in succession the world has been pressed by numerous varying troubles and calamities, until it has at length arrived at almost the extreme of wretchedness. We indeed stand amazed at our disasters, or suggest other reasons why God so afflicts us. But if we reflect how slight the error by which the Corinthians had vitiated the sacred supper was, if contrasted with all the defilements by which in the present day it is sullied and polluted amongst ourselves, it is strange not to perceive that God, who so severely punished them, is justly more offended with us.

Were I to follow out all the flagitious corruptions of ecclesiastical government, I should enter an interminable forest. Of the lives of the priests, for many reasons I at present decline to speak, but there are three vices of an intolerable description on which each individual may reflect for himself. First, disregarding the character of a holy vocation, clerical offices are everywhere acquired either by violence or by simony, or by other dishonest and impious arts.

Secondly, the rulers of the church, insofar as regards the performance of their duties, are more like empty shadows or lifeless images than true ministers. And thirdly, when they ought to govern consciences in accordance with the word of God, they oppress them with an iniquitous tyranny and hold them in bondage by the fetters of many impious laws. Is it true that not only in contempt of the laws of God and man, but in the absence of everything like a sense of shame, foul disorder reigns in the appointment of bishops and presbyters? That caprice assumes the place of justice, simony is seldom absent, and as if these were evils of no consequence, the correction of them is deferred to a future age? What has become of the duty of teaching, the proper characteristic of the ministry? As to true liberty of conscience, we know how many struggles Paul engaged in and how earnestly he contended in its defense.

But every person who judges impartially must certainly perceive that at the present time we have much more cause to contend for it. In a corruption of sound doctrines so extreme, in a pollution of the sacraments so nefarious, in a condition of the church so deplorable, those who maintain that we ought not to have felt so strongly would have been satisfied with nothing less than a perfidious intolerance by which we should have betrayed the worship of God, the glory of Christ, the salvation of men, the entire administration of the sacraments and the government of the church. There is something specious in the name of moderation, and tolerance is a quality which has a fair appearance and seems worthy of praise.

But the rule which we must observe at all hazards is never to endure patiently that the sacred name of God should be assailed with impious blasphemy, that his eternal truth should be suppressed by the devil's lies, that Christ should be insulted, his holy mysteries polluted, unhappy souls cruelly murdered, and the church left to writhe in extremity under the effect of a deadly wound. This would be not meekness, but indifference about things to which all others ought to be postponed. I trust I have now clearly shown, as I proposed, that in correcting the corruption of the church we have by no means been more urgent than the case demanded.

Even those who blame us are aware of this, and accordingly they have recourse to another charge, that is, that the utmost we have gained by our interference has been to fill the Christian world, which was formerly

at peace, with intestine discord, that so far from any amendment appearing things have gone on to worse, that of those who have embraced our doctrine few have been made better, nay, that some have been emboldened, if not to greater, at least to more unrestrained licentiousness. They object, moreover, that in our churches there is no discipline, no laws of abstinence, no exercises of humility, that the people thrown loose from the yoke riot with impunity in vicious courses. Lastly, they throw upon us the odium of seizing on the property of ecclesiastics, asserting that our princes have made a rush upon it as if it had been lawful spoil, that in this way the church has been violently and shamefully plundered, and that now the patrimony of the church is possessed indiscriminately by those who amid the uproar of contention have usurped it without law or any proper title.

I, for my part, deny not that when in piety reigned her kingdom was disturbed by us, but if at the moment when the light of sound and pious doctrine beamed upon the world, all as in duty bound had spontaneously and with ready mind lent their aid, there would at the present day be no less peace and quietness in all the churches, the kingdom of Christ flourishing, than in the days when Antichrist tyrannized. Let those who, it is manifest, impede the course of truth desist from the waging war with Christ, and there will instantly be perfect concord. Or let them desist from throwing upon us the blame of dissensions which they themselves excite.

For it is certainly most unfair while they refuse all terms of peace unless Antichrist be permitted after putting the doctrine of piety to flight, and as it were again consigning Christ to the tomb, to subjugate the church. It is most unfair not only to boast as if they themselves were innocent, but also to insult over us, and that we, who desire nothing else than unity, and whose only bond of union is the eternal truth of God, should bear all the blame and odium as much as if we were the authors of dissension. In regard to the allegation that no fruit has been produced by our doctrine, I am well aware that profane men deride us and allege that in probing sores which are incurable we only enlarge the ulcer.

For their opinion is that the desperate condition of the church makes it vain to attempt remedies, there being no hope of cure. And they hence conclude that the best course is not to meddle with an evil while fixed. Those who speak in this way understand not that the restoration of the church is the work of God, and no more depends on the hopes and opinions of men than the resurrection of the dead, or any other miracle of that description.

Here, therefore, we are not to wait for facility of action, either from the will of men or the temper of the times, but must rush forward through the midst of despair. It is the will of our Master that His gospel be preached. Let us obey His command and follow whithersoever He calls.

What the success will be is not ours to inquire. Our only duty is to wish for what is best and beseech it of the Lord in prayer, to strive with all zeal, solicitude, and diligence to bring about the desired result, and at the same time to submit with patience to whatever that result may be. Groundless, therefore, is the charge brought against us of not having done all the good which we wished and which was to be desired.

God bids us plant and water. We have done so. He alone gives the increase.

What then if He chooses not to give according to our wish? If it is clear that we have faithfully done our part, let not our adversaries require more of us. If the result is unfavorable, let them expostulate with God. But the pretense that no benefit has resulted from our doctrine is most false.

I say nothing of the correction of external idolatry and of numerous superstitions and errors, though that is not to be counted of no moment. But is there no fruit in this that many who are truly pious feel their obligation to us, in that they have at length learned to worship God with a pure heart, and to invoke Him with a calm conscience, having been freed from perpetual torments and furnished with true delight in Christ, so as to be able to confide in Him? But if we are asked for proofs which every eye can see, it has not fared so unhappily with us that we cannot point to numerous sources of rejoicing. How many who formerly led a vicious course of life have been so reformed as to seem converted into new men? How many whose past lives have been freed from censure, nay, who were held in the highest estimation, have, instead of retrograding, been able to testify by their conduct that our ministry has proved neither barren nor unfruitful? Our enemies, no doubt, have it in their power to traduce and lacerate us by their calumnies, especially among the ignorant.

But this they can never wrest from us, that is, that in those who have embraced our doctrine, greater innocence, integrity, and true holiness are found than in all who among them are deemed of greatest excellence. But if there are any, and we confess the number is but two great, who pervert the gospel by giving loose reins to their passions, the circumstance assuredly is not new. And if it was, how can we be made to bear the blame of it? It is admitted that the gospel is the only rule of a good and holy life, but in the fact that all do not allow themselves to be ruled by it, and that some, as if set free from restraint, even sin more presumptuously, we recognize the truth of Simeon's saying that Christ is set up that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Luke 2 verse 35 If God sees meet to kindle the light of the gospel, in order that the hidden iniquity of the wicked may be exposed, out of this to concoct a charge against the ministers of the gospel and their preaching is the utmost stretch of malice and effrontery. But I do them no injury when I retort upon them the very thing out of which they attempt to rear up a charge against us. For where do the despisers of God learn their daring licentiousness except to be from imagining, amid the uproar of dissensions, that there is nothing which they are not licensed to do? In this, therefore, let them recognize it as their own crime, that is, that by retarding the course of truth they encourage the wicked with hopes of impunity.

As to the vituperative allegation that we are devoid of discipline and laws fitted to keep the people under due restraint, we are provided with a twofold answer. Were I to say that discipline is adequately established among us, I should be refuted by the daily discourses in which our teachers lament that it still lies neglected. But while I deny not that we want the blessing of thorough discipline, still I say it ought to be considered who the persons are to whom it has hitherto been and still is owing that we do not enjoy it in order that they may be made to bear the blame.

Let our enemies deny, if they can, that they employ every artifice for the purpose not only of hampering our exertions in forming and constituting our churches, but also of defeating and overthrowing whatever we begin. We labour sedulously in building up the church, and when we are intent on the work, they, ever and anon, make a hostile entrance to disturb our operation and allow us no interval which we might employ in arranging the domestic concerns of the church. After this they upbraid us with the dilapidation of which they are themselves the cause.

What kind of ingeniousness is this, to give us a constant annoyance and then make it a charge against us that in consequence of that annoyance we are not at leisure to arrange all the departments of the church? God is witness to our grief, men witness to our complaints on account of the distance we still are from perfection. But then it is said there are some things pertaining to discipline which we have discarded. True,

but as men are wont in rebuilding a fallen edifice to drag out and collect the fragments which lie in heat or scattered about, in order that they may fit each into its proper place, so were we obliged to act.

For if any part of ancient discipline survived, it was so mixed and buried with the confused mass of ruins, it had so lost its pristine form that no use could be made of it till it was gathered out from amidst the confusion. I wish at all events our opponents would stimulate us by their example. But how? The discipline which they clamorously maintain that we have not, do they themselves possess? Would it not be better were they to unite with us in admitting and confessing their fault before God than to upbraid us with what may instantly be retorted on their own head? Discipline consists of two parts, the one relating to the clergy, the other to the people.

Now, I wish to know with what strictness they confine their clergy to an upright and chaste behavior, that pure and more refined holiness to which the ancient canons bind the clergy, I exact not of them, for I know how they laugh in their hearts when anyone raises up from oblivion those laws which have now been dead for several ages. All I ask of their clergy is common decency, so that if they are not distinguished for purity of life, they may at least not be infamous for turpitude. When anyone, by means of gifts or favor or sordid obsequiousness or surreptitious certificates, winds his way into the priesthood, the canons pronounce its simony and order it as such to be punished.

How many in the present day enter the priesthood by any other means? But adio, as I have said, to that stern rigor. Still, were no enactment on the subject in existence, how disgraceful is it that the houses of bishops should be forges of open and adulterous simony. What shall I say of the Roman see, where it now seems matter of course that sacerdotal offices are openly disposed of to the highest bidder and where they are the higher paid for panderism and sorcery and the obscener crimes? If common sense has any influence amongst us, can it but seem monstrous that boys of twelve years of age should be made archbishops? When Christ was buffeted, was he more insulted than by this? Can there be a greater mockery to God and man than when a boy is set to rule a Christian people and installed in the seat of a father and pastor? The injunctions of the canons concerning bishops and presbyters are that all should be vigilant in their stations and no one long absent from his church.

But let us suppose that there was no such precept, who sees not that the Christian name is subjected to the derision even of Turks when the denomination of pastor of a church is given to one who does not pay it a single visit during his whole life? For as to constant residence in the place where he has been appointed pastor, it is now long since an example of it became rare. Bishops and abbots either hold their own courts or dwell in ordinary in the courts of princes. Each, according to his disposition, selects the place where he may live in luxury.

Those again who take more pleasure in their nest are truly said to reside in their benefits for they are lazy bellies to whom nothing is less known than their duty. It was forbidden by the ancient canons to give two churches to one individual. Well, let this prohibition be as it had never been.

Still, with what gloss will they excuse the absurdity of bestowing five benefices or more on one man? Of allowing one and that one sometimes a boy to possess three bishoprics seated at such a distance from each other that he could barely scarcely make the circuit of them in a year, were he to do nothing else. The canons require that in promoting priests a strict and minute examination be made into life and doctrine. Let us concede to the present times that they cannot be tied down to so sterner rule.

But we see how the ignorant and those utterly devoid both of learning and prudence are inducted without discrimination. Even in hiring a mule driver more regard is paid to his past life than in choosing a priest. This is no fiction, no exaggeration.

True, they go through the form like players on a stage that they may exhibit some image of ancient practice. The bishops or the suffragans put the question whether those whom they have determined to ordain are worthy. There is some one present to answer that they are worthy.

There is no occasion to go far for a witness or to bribe him for his testimony. The answer is merely a form. All beetles, taunters and doorkeepers know it by heart.

Then, after ordination the least suspicion of lewdness in the clergy ought according to the ancient canon to be corrected and the proof of it punished with deposition and excommunication. Let us remit somewhat of this ancient rigor. Yet what will be said to such a toleration of daily lewdness as might almost imply a right to commit it? The canons declare that on no account shall a clergyman be permitted to indulge in hunting or gaming or revelry and dancing.

Nay, they even expel from the ministry every man to whom any kind of infamy attaches. In like manner, all who involve themselves in secular affairs or so intermeddle in civil offices as to distract their attention from the ministry, all, in fine, who are not assiduous in the discharge of their duties, they order to be severely censured and if they repent not deposed. It will not be objective that these severe remedies which cut all vices to the quick this age cannot bear.

Be it so, I do not call upon them for so much purity, but that an unbridled licentiousness should reign in the clergy, a licentiousness so unbridled that they, more than any other order, give additional taint to a world already most corrupt, who can forgive them? With regard to the discipline exercised over the people, the matter stands thus. Provided the domination of the clergy remains intact, provided no deduction is made from their tribute or plunder, almost anything else is done with impunity or carelessly overlooked. We see the general prevalence of all kinds of wickedness in the manners of society.

In proof of this, I will call no other witnesses than your Imperial Majesty and most illustrious princes. I admit that the facts attributable to many causes, but among the many, the primary cause is that the priests, either from indulgence or carelessness, have allowed the wicked to give loose reins to their lusts. How do they act at the present hour? What care do they employ in eradicating vices, or at least in checking them? Where are their admonitions? Where are their censures? To omit other things, what use is made of excommunication, that best nerve of discipline? True, they possess, under the name of excommunication, a tyrannical thunderbolt which they hurl at those whom they call contumacious.

But what contumacy do they punish, unless it be of persons who, when cited to their tribunal about money matters, have either not appeared or from poverty have failed to satisfy their demands? Accordingly, the most salutary remedy for chastising the guilty, they merely abuse in vexing the poor and the innocent. They have, moreover, the ridiculous custom of sometimes flagellating hidden crimes with an anathema in the case where a theft has been committed and the thief is unknown. This practice is altogether at variance with the institution of Christ.

But though so many disgraceful proceedings take place openly before the eyes of all, as to them is asleep. And yet, the very persons among whom all these disorders prevail have the hardihood to upraise us with want of order. No doubt, if we are equally guilty, we gain nothing by accusing them.

But, in what I have hitherto said, my object has not been by recrimination to evade the charge which they bring against us, but to show the real value of that discipline which they complain that we have overthrown. If it is thought proper to compare the two, we are confident that our disorder, such as it is, will be found at all events somewhat more orderly than the kind of order in which they glory. I mean not to palliate or flatter our defects, when I thus speak.

I know how much we require to be improved. Undoubtedly, were God to call us to account, excuse would be difficult. But when called to answer our enemies, we have a better cause and an easier victory than we could wish.

With similar effrontery, they clamor that we have seized upon the wealth of the Church and applied it to secular purposes. Were I to say that we have not sinned in this respect, I should lie. Indeed, changes of such magnitude are seldom made without bringing some inconveniences along with them.

If herein ought has been done wrong, I excuse it not. But, with what face do our adversaries present this charge against us? They say, it is sacrilege to convert the wealth of the Church to secular uses. I admit it.

They add that we do so. I reply that we have not the least objection to answer for ourselves, provided they too in their turn come prepared to plead their cause. We will immediately attend to our own case.

Meanwhile, let us see what they do. Of bishops, I say nothing except what all see, that they not only rival princes in the splendor of their dress, the luxuries of their table, the number of their servants, the magnificence of their palaces, in short, every kind of luxury, but also that they dilapidate and squander ecclesiastical revenues in expenditure of a much more shameful description. I say nothing of field sports, nothing of gaming, nothing of other pleasures which absorb no small portion of their income, but to take from the Church in order to spend on pimps and harlots is surely too bad.

Then, how absurd not only to plume themselves on pomp and show, but to carry them to the utmost excess. Time was when poverty in priests was deemed glorious, so it was in the Council of Aquila. On one occasion, too, it was decreed that a bishop should reside within a short distance of his church in a humble dwelling with a scanty table and mean furniture.

But, without going to that ancient rigor, after numerous corruptions had crept in with the progress of wealth, even then the ancient law was again confirmed, which divided ecclesiastical revenues into four portions, one to go to the bishop for hospitality and the relief of those in want, another to the clergy, a third to the poor, and a fourth to the repairing of churches. Gregory attests that this rule was in full observance even in his day. Besides, were there no laws on the subject, and at one time there were none, for that which I have mentioned was, as in the case of other laws, rendered necessary by the corruption of manners, still there is no one who will not admit the truth of what Jerome says.

Ad nipotianem, that is, that it is the glory of a bishop to provide for the wants of the poor and the disgrace of all priests to have a hankering after private wealth. It will, perhaps, be thought that another injunction which he gives in the same passage is too severe, that is, that open tables should be kept for the poor and for strangers. It is, however, equally well founded.

The nearer abbots approach to bishops in extent of revenue the more they resemble them. Canons and parish priests not deriving enough from one cure for gluttony, luxury, and pomp soon found out a compendious method of remedying the inconvenience. For there is nothing to prevent him who could, in

one month, swallow much more than he draws in a year from holding four or five benefices.

The burden is nothing thought of, for there are vicars at hand ready to stoop and take it on their shoulders provided they are allowed to gobble up some small portion of the proceeds. Nay, few are found who will be contented with one bishopric or one abbacy. Those of the clergy who live at the public expense of the Church, though able to live on their patrimony, Jerome styles sacrilegious.

What, then, must be thought of those who at once engulf three bishoprics, that is, from fifty to a hundred tolerable patrimony? And, lest they complain that they are unjustly traduced for the faults of a few, what are we to think of those who not only luxuriate on the public revenues of the Church, but abuse them in paying the hire of panders and courtesans? I speak only of what is notorious. Then, were we to ask, I say, not at the whole order, but at the few who reside in their benefices, by what right they receive even a frugal and moderate stipend, even such a question they are not able to answer. For what duties do they perform in return? In the same way as anciently under the law those who serve at the altar live by the altar, even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

These are Paul's words. Let them, then, show us that they are ministers of the gospel, and I will have no difficulty in conceding their right to stipend. The ox must not be muzzled that tread about the corn, but is it not altogether at variance with reason that the plowing oxen should starve and the lazy asses be fed? They will say, however, that they serve at the altar.

I answer that the priests under the law deserve maintenance by ministering at an altar, but that, as Paul declares, the case under the New Testament is different. And what are those altar services for which they allege that maintenance is due them? Forsooth, that they may perform their masses and chant in churches, that is, partly labor to no purpose and partly perpetrate sacrilege, thereby provoking the anger of God. See for what it is that they are alimented at the public expense? There are some who accuse our princes of inexhaustible sacrilege as having with violence and the greatest injustice seized upon the patrimony of the church which had been consecrated to God and is now dilapidating it for profane uses.

I have already declared that I am unwilling to be the apologist of everything that is done amongst us. Nay, rather, I openly declare my dissatisfaction that more regard is not paid to the due application of ecclesiastical revenues to those purposes only for which they were destined. This I deplore in common with all good men, but the only point under discussion at present is whether our princes sacrilegiously seized on the revenues of the church when they appropriated what they had rescued out of the hands of priests and monks.

Is it profanation to apply these to some other purpose in stuffing such lazy bellies? For it is their own cause which our adversaries plead, not the cause of Christ and His church. No doubt heavy judgments are denounced against those who rob the church and carry off for their own use what belongs to her, but the reason is at the same time added, that is, because they defraud true ministers of their maintenance and because starving the poor to death they are guilty of their blood. But what have our opponents to do with it? For who among their whole tribe can make the declaration which Ambrose once made that whatever he possessed was the revenue of the needy, and again that everything which a bishop possesses belongs to the poor? Nay, how few of them do not abuse what they possess with as much license as if it had been given to be profusely squandered as they list.

It is vain therefore for them to expostulate because deprived of that which they possessed without any right and wasted with the greatest iniquity. And it was not only lawful but necessary also for our princes so

to deprive them. When they saw the church absolutely destitute of true ministers and the revenues destined for their support absorbed by lazy idle men, when they saw the patrimony of Christ and the poor either engulfed by a few or dissolutely wasted on expensive luxuries, were they not to interfere? Nay, when they saw the obstinate enemies of the truth lying like an incubus on the patrimony of the church and abusing it to attack Christ to oppress sound doctrine and persecute its ministers, was it not right immediately to wrest it from their hands that at all events they might not be armed and equipped by the resources of the church to vex the church? King Josiah is commended on the authority of the Holy Spirit because on perceiving that the sacred oblations were improperly consumed by the priests he appointed an officer to call them to account.

2 Chronicles 24 verse 14 And yet they were priests whom God had entrusted with the ordinary administration. What then is to be done with those who exercise no lawful ministry and who, not only like them, neglect the repairing of the temple but exert all their nerves and resources to pull down the church? But someone will ask, how are the appropriated revenues administered? Certainly not in a manner altogether free from blame but still in a manner far better and holier than by our enemies. Out of them, at all events, true ministers are supported who feed their flocks with the doctrine of salvation whereas formerly churches left utterly destitute of pastors were burdened with the payment of them.

Wherever schools or hospitals for the poor existed, they remain. In some instances the revenues have been increased, in none have they been diminished. In many places also, in lieu of monasteries, hospitals have been established where there were none before.

In others, new schools have been erected in which not only have regular salaries been given to the masters but youth are trained also in the hope of being afterward of service to the church. In fine, churches derive many advantages in common from these revenues with which before only monks and priests were gorged. Nor is it a small portion which is devoted to extraordinary expenses though these are well entitled to be taken into account.

It is certain that much more is consumed when matters are in disorder than would be if proper arrangements were made among the churches. But nothing could be more unjust than to deny to our princes and magistrates the right of making expenditure of this kind not for their private benefit but to meet the public necessities of the church. Besides, our adversaries forget to deduct their spoliation and unjust exactions by which communities were pillaged for sacrifices of which they are now relieved.

But there is one reason which renders all this discussion in a great measure superfluous. More than three years ago, our princes declared their readiness to make restitution provided the same course were enforced against those who detain a much larger amount for a less honorable cause and who are guilty of much greater corruption in the administration of it. Our princes, therefore, stand bound to your imperial majesty by their promise.

The document also is before the world so that this should not be any hindrance to uniformity of doctrine. The last and principal charge which they bring against us is that we have made schism in the church and here they boldly maintain against us that in no cause is it lawful to break the unity of the church. How far they do us injustice, the books of our authors bear witness.

Now, however, let them take this brief reply that we neither descend from the church nor are aliens from her communion but as by this vicious name of church they are wont to cast dust in the eyes even of persons otherwise pious and right hearted I beseech your imperial majesty and you most illustrious

princes first to divest yourselves of all prejudice that you may give an impartial ear to our defense. Secondly, not to be instantly terrified on hearing the name of church but to remember that the prophets and the apostles had with the pretended church of their days a similar contest similar to that which you see us have in the present day with the Roman pontiff and his whole train. When they by the command of God invade freely against idolatry superstition and the profanation of the temple and its sacred rites against the carelessness and lethargy of priests and against the general avarice cruelty and life anxiousness they were constantly met with the objection which our opponents have ever in their mouths that by dissenting from the common opinion they violated the unity of the church.

The ordinary government of the church was then vested in the priests. They had not presumptuously irrigated it to themselves but God had conferred it upon them by his law. It would occupy too much time to point out all the instances.

Let us therefore be contented with a single instance in the case of Jeremiah. He had to do with the whole college of priests and the arms with which they attacked him with these. Come and let us devise devices against Jeremiah for the law shall not perish from the priest nor counsel from the wise nor the word from the prophet.

Jeremiah 18 verse 18 They had among them a high priest to reject whose judgment was a capital crime and they had the whole order to which God himself had committed the government of the Jewish church concurring with them. If the unity of the church is violated by him who is instructed solely by divine truth opposes himself to ordinary authority the prophet must be schismatic because not at all deterred by such menaces from warring with the impiety of the priests he steadily persevered. That the eternal truth of God preached by the prophets and apostles is on our side we are prepared to show and it is easy indeed for any man to perceive.

But all that is done is to assail us with this battering ram. Quote Nothing can excuse withdrawal from the church end of quote. We deny out and out that we do so.

But with what then do they urge us? With nothing more than this that to them belongs the ordinary government of the church. But how much better right had the enemies of Jeremiah to use this argument? To them at all events there still remained a legal priesthood instituted by God so that their vocation was unquestionable. Those who in the present day have the name of Jesus Christ as their prelate cannot prove their vocation by any laws human or divine.

Be it however that in this respect both are on a footing still unless they previously convict the holy prophet of schism they will prove nothing against us by that specious title of church. I have thus mentioned one prophet as an example. But all the others declared that they had the same battle to fight wicked priests endeavoring to overwhelm them by a perversion of this term church.

And how did the apostles act? Was it not necessary for them in professing themselves the servant of Christ to declare war upon the synagogue? And yet the office and dignity of the priesthood were not then lost? But it will be said that though the prophets and apostles descended from wicked priests in doctrine they still cultivated communion with them in sacrifices and prayers. I admit they did provided they were not forced into idolatry. But which of the prophets do we read of as ever having sacrificed in Bethel? Which of the faithful do we suppose communicated in impure sacrifices when the temple was polluted by Antiochus and profane rites were introduced into it? On the whole we conclude that the servants of God never felt themselves obstructed by this empty title of church when it was put forward to support the reign of impiety.

It is not enough therefore to slipperily throw out the name of church, but judgment must be used to ascertain which is the true church and what is the nature of its unity. And the thing necessary to be attended to, first of all, is to beware of separating the church from Christ, its head. When I say Christ, I include the doctrine of his gospel, which he sealed with his blood.

Our adversaries therefore, if they would persuade us that they are the true church, must first of all show that the true doctrine of God is among them. And this is the meaning of what we often repeat, that is, that the uniform characteristics of a well-ordered church are the preaching of sound doctrine and the pure administration of the sacraments. For since Paul declares in Ephesians 2 verse 20 that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, it necessarily follows that any church not resting on this foundation must immediately fall.

I come now to our opponents. They no doubt boast in lofty terms that Christ is on their side. As soon as they exhibit him in their word, we will believe it, but not sooner.

They in the same way insist on the term church. But where, we ask, is that doctrine which Paul declares to be the only foundation of the church? Doubtless your imperial majesty now sees that there is a vast difference between assailing us with the reality and assailing us only with the name of church. We are as ready to confess as they are that those who abandon the church, the common mother of the faithful, the pillar and ground of the truth, revolt from Christ also.

But we mean a church which, from incorruptible seed, begets children for immortality, and when begotten, nourishes them with spiritual food, that seed and food being the word of God, and which, by its ministry, preserves entire the truth which God deposited in its bosom. This mark is in no degree doubtful, in no degree fallacious, and it is the mark which God himself impressed upon his church, that she might be discerned thereby. Do we seem unjust in demanding to see this mark? Wherever it exists not, no face of a church is seen.

If the name merely is put forward, we have only to quote the well-known passage of Jeremiah, which says, Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are thee. Is this house which ye called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? In like manner, the unity of the church, such as Paul describes it, we protest, we hold sacred, and we denounce anathema against all who in any way violate it. The principle from which Paul derives unity is that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who has called us into one hope.

Ephesians 4 verse 4 and 5. Therefore we are one body and one spirit, as is here enjoined, if we adhere to God only, that is, be bound to each other by the tie of faith. We ought, moreover, to remember what is said in another passage, that faith cometh by the word of God. Let it, therefore, be a fixed point that a holy unity exists amongst us when consenting in pure doctrine we are united in Christ alone.

And indeed, if concurrence in any kind of doctrine were sufficient, in what possible way could the church of God be distinguished from the impious factions of the wicked? Wherefore the apostle shortly after adds that the ministry was instituted for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, that we be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, but speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ. Ephesians 4 verse 12 through 15 Could he more plainly comprise the whole unity of the church in a holy agreement in true doctrine than when he calls us back to Christ and to faith, which is included in the knowledge of him and to obedience to the truth? Nor is any lengthened demonstration of

this needed by those who believe the church to be that sheepfold of which Christ alone is the shepherd, and where his voice only is heard and distinguished from the voice of strangers. And this is confirmed by Paul when he prays for the Romans.

The God of patience and consolation grants you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus, that he may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15 verse 5 and 6 Let our opponents then in the first instance draw near to Christ, and then let them convict us of schism in daring to dissent from them in doctrine. But since I have made it plain that Christ is banished from their society and the doctrine of his gospel exterminated, their charge against us simply amounts to this, that we adhere to Christ in preference to them.

For what man pray will believe that those who refuse to be led away from Christ in his truth in order to deliver themselves into the power of men are thereby schismatics and deserters from the communion of the church. I certainly admit that respect is to be shown to priests and that there is great danger in despising ordinary authority. If then they were to say that we are not at our own hand to resist ordinary authority, we should have no difficulty in subscribing to the sentiment.

For we are not so rude as not to see what confusion must arise when the authority of rulers is not respected. Let pastors then have their due honor, an honor, however, not derogatory in any degree to the supreme authority of Christ to whom it behooves them and every man to be subject. For God declares by Malachi that the government of the Israelitish church was committed to the priests under the condition that they should faithfully fulfill the covenant made with them, that is, that their lips should keep knowledge and expound the law to the people.

Malachi 2 7 When the priests altogether failed in this condition, he declares that by their perfidy the covenant was abrogated and made null. Pastors are mistaken if they imagine that they are invested with the government of the church on any other terms than that of being ministers and witnesses of the truth of God. As long, therefore, as in opposition to the law and to the nature of their office they eagerly wage war with the truth of God, let them not arrogate to themselves a power which God never bestowed, either formerly on priests or now on bishops, on any other terms than those which have been mentioned.

But because they hold that the communion of the church is confined to a kind of regimen which they have struck out for themselves, they think it sufficient to decide the victory in their favor, when they point to our alienation from the Romish sea. But to this vaunted primacy of the Romish sea it is not difficult to reply. It is a subject, however, on which I will not enter here, both because it would occupy too much time and because it has been amply discussed by our writers.

I will only beg your imperial majesty and most illustrious princes to listen to Cyprian, when he points out a better method of ascertaining the true communion of the church than that of referring it, as our opponents do, to the Roman pontiff alone. For after placing the only source of ecclesiastical concord in the episcopal authority of Christ, which episcopal authority he affirms that each bishop, to the extent to which it has been communicated, holds entire, he thus proceeds. There is one church which by the increase of its fruitfulness spreads into a multitude, just as there are many rays of the sun but only one light, many branches in a tree but one trunk, upheld by its tenacious root.

And when many streams flow from one fountain, though from the copiousness of the supply, there seems a division into parts, still in regard to the origin, unity is preserved. Separate a ray from the body of the sun, the unity of the light is not divided. Break a tree, broken cannot germinate.

Cut a stream from the fountain and it dries up. So also the church of God, irradiated with light, sends its beams over the whole world. Still it is one light which is everywhere diffused.

The unity of the body is not violated." Heresies and schisms, therefore, arise when a head is regarded, nor the doctrine of the heavenly master preserved. Let them then show us a hierarchy in which the bishops are distinguished, but not for refusing to be subject to Christ, in which they depend upon him as the only head, and act solely with reference to him, in which they cultivate brotherly friendship with each other, found together by no other tie than his truth. Then, indeed, I will confess that there is no anathema too strong for those who do not regard them with reverence and yield them the fullest obedience.

But is there anything like this in that false mask of hierarchy on which they plume themselves? The Roman pontiff alone, as Christ's vicar, is in the ascendant, and domineers without law and without measure, after the manner of a tyrant, nay, with more abandoned effrontery than a tyrant. The rest of the body is framed more according to his standard than that of Christ. The light of which Cyprian speaks is extinguished, the copious fountain cut off.

In short, the only thing exhibited is the tallness of the tree, but a tree is severed from its root. I am aware that our adversaries have good reason for laboring so strenuously to maintain the primacy of the Romish sea. They feel that on it both themselves and their all depend.

But your part, most invincible emperor and most illustrious princes, is to be on your guard in order that they may not when vain glosses deceive you, as they are wont to deceive the unwary. And first, this vaunted supremacy even themselves are forced to confess was established by no divine authority but by the mere will of man. At least when we give proof of this fact, though they do not expressly assent, they seem as if ashamed to maintain the opposite.

There was a time indeed when they audaciously perverted certain passages of scripture to confirm this palpable falsehood, but as soon as we came to close quarters, it was found easy to pluck out of their hands the bits of last to which, when at a distance, they had given the appearance of swords. Abandoned accordingly by the word of God, they flee for aid to antiquity, but here also, without much ado, we have dislodged them. For both the writings of holy fathers, the acts of counsel, and all history make it plain that this height of power which the Roman pontiff has now possessed for about four hundred years was attained gradually, or rather was either craftily crept into or violently seized.

But let us forgive them this, and let them take it for granted that primacy was divinely bestowed on the Romish seat, and has been sanctioned by the uniform consent of the ancient church. Still, there is room for this primacy only on the supposition that Rome has both a true church and a true bishop. For the honour of the seat cannot remain after the seat itself has ceased to exist.

I ask, then, in what respect the Roman pontiff performs the duty of a bishop so as to oblige us to recognize him as a bishop. There is a celebrated saying of Augustine, Bishopric is the name of an office and not a mere title of honour. And ancient synods define the duties of a bishop to consist in feeding the people by the preaching of the word, in administering the sacraments, in curbing clergy and people by holy discipline, and, in order not to be distracted from these duties, in withdrawing from all the ordinary cares of the present life.

In all these duties, these presbyters ought to be the bishop's co-adjutors. Which of them do the pope and his cardinals pretend to perform? Let them say, then, on what ground they claim to be regarded as

legitimate pastors, while they do not, with their little finger in appearance, even touch any part of the duty. But let us grant all these things, that is, that he is a bishop who entirely neglects every part of his duty, and that a church which is destitute, as well of the ministry of the word as of the pure administration of the sacraments.

Still, what answer is made when we add not only that these are wanting, but that everything which exists is directly the reverse? For several centuries, that sea has been possessed by impious superstitions, open idolatry, perverse doctrines, while those great truths in which the Christian religion chiefly consists have been suppressed. By the prostitution of the sacraments to filthy lucre and other abominations, Christ has been held up to such extreme derision that he has, in a manner, been crucified afresh. Can she be the mother of all churches, who not only does not retain, I do not say the faith, but even a single liniment of the true Church, and has snapped asunder all those bonds of Holy Communion by which believers should be linked together? The Roman pontiff is now opposing himself to the reviving doctrines of the gospel, just as if his head were at stake.

Does he not, by this very fact, demonstrate that there will be no safety for his sea, unless he can put to flight the kingdom of Christ? Your Imperial Majesty is aware how wide a field of discussion here opens upon me, but to conclude this point in a few words. I deny the sea to be apostolical, wherein naught is seen but a shocking apostasy. I deny him to be the vicar of Christ, who, infuriously persecuting the gospel, demonstrates by his conduct that he is antichrist.

I deny him to be the successor of Peter, who is doing his utmost to demolish every edifice that Peter built. And I deny him to be the head of the church, who, by his tyranny, lacerates and dismembers the church, after dissevering her from Christ, her true and only head. Let these denials be answered by those who are so bent on chaining the hierarchy of the church to the Romish sea, that they hesitate not to subordinate the sure and tried doctrines of the gospel to the authority of the Pope.

Yea, I say, let them answer. Only do you, most invincible emperor and most illustrious princes, consider whether, in so calling upon them, the thing I ask is just or unjust. From what has been said, it will doubtless be easy for you to perceive how little attention is due to the calumny of our adversaries, when they accuse us of impious presumption and, as it were, inexhaustible audacity in having attempted to purify the church from corruption, both in doctrine and ceremonies, without waiting for the back of the Roman pontiff.

They say we have done what private individuals have no right to do, but in regard to ameliorating the condition of the church, what was to be hoped from him to whom we were required to give place? Any man who considers how Luther and the other reformers acted at the outset, and how they afterwards proceeded, will deem it unnecessary to call upon us for any defense. When matters were still entire, Luther himself humbly besought the pontiff that he would be pleased to cure the very grievous disorders of the church. Did his supplication succeed? The evils having still increased, the necessity of the case, even had Luther been silent, should have been stimulus enough to urge the Pope to delay no longer.

The whole Christian world plainly demanded this of him, and he had in his hands the means of satisfying the pious wishes of all. Did he do so? He now talks of impediments, but if the fact be traced to its source, it will be found that he has all along been both to himself and to others the only impediment. But why insist on these lighter arguments? Is it not in itself alone an argument of sufficient clearness and sufficient weight that from the commencement up to the present time he gives us no hope of transacting with him until we again bury Christ and return to every impiety which formerly existed, that he may establish them

on a firmer basis than before? This unquestionably is the reason why still in the present day our opponents so strenuously maintain that we had no right to meddle, to intermeddle, with the revival of the Church, not that the thing was not necessary, this it were too desperate a frontery to deny, but because they are desirous that as well as the safety as the ruin of the Church should be suspended on the mere beck and pleasure of the Roman Pontiff.

Let us now attend to the only remedy left us by those who think it impiety to move a finger, how great soever the evils by which the Church is oppressed. They put us off to a universal counsel. What? If the major depart from obstinacy rush upon their own destruction, must we therefore perish along with them when we have the means of consulting for our own safety? But they tell us it is unlawful to violate the unity of the Church, and that unity is violated if any party decide an article of faith by themselves without calling in the others.

Then they enlarge on the inconveniences to which such a course might lead, that nothing could be expected but fearful devastation and chaotic confusion were each people and nation to adopt for itself its peculiar form of faith. Things like these might be said justly, and even oppositely, to the occasion, if any one member of the Church, in contempt of unity, should of its own accord separate itself from the others. But that is not the point now in dispute.

I wish indeed it were possible for all the monarchs and states of the Christian world to unite in a holy league, and resolve on a simultaneous amendment of the present evils. But since we see that some are averse to amelioration, and that others involved in war or occupied with other cares cannot give their attention to the subject, how long, pray, must we, in waiting for others defer consulting for ourselves? And more freely to explain the source of all our evils, we see that the Roman Pontiff, if he can prevent it, will never prevent all churches to unite, I do not say in due consultation, but in assembling any council at all. He will indeed, as often as he has asked, give promises in abundance, provided he sees all the ways shut up and all modes of access interrupted, while he has in his hand obstructions which he can every now and then throw in, so as never to want pretexts for turgiversation.

With a few exceptions, he has all the cardinals, bishops, and abbots consenting with him in this matter, since their only thought is how to retain possession of their usurped tyranny. As to the welfare or destruction of the church, it gives them not the least concern. I am not afraid, most invincible Caesar, and most illustrious princess, that my statement will seem incredible, or that it will be difficult to persuade you of its truth.

Nay, rather, I appeal to the consciences of you all, whether I have stated any thing which your own experience does not confirm. Meanwhile, the church lies in the greatest peril. An infinite number of souls, not knowing in what direction to turn, are miserably perplexed.

Many, even forestalled by death, perish if not saved miraculously by the Lord. Diversified sects arrive. Numbers, whose impiety was formerly hid, assume, from the present dissensions, are licensed to believe nothing at all, while many minds, being otherwise not ill-disposed, begin to part with their religious impressions.

There is no discipline to check these evils. Amongst us who glory in the name of Christ only, and have the same back to them, there is no more agreement than if we professed religions entirely different. And the most miserable thing of all is that there is at hand, nay almost in sight, a breaking up of the whole church, for which, after it has taken place, it will be in vain to seek for remedy.

Seeing, therefore, that in bringing assistance to the church in her great distress and extreme danger, no celerity can be too rapid, what else do those who put us off to a general council, of which there is no prospect, but insult both God and man? The Germans must therefore submit to have the sentence passed upon them, that they choose to look on quietly and see the church of God perish from their land, when they have the means of curing her disorders, or they must insult her and instantly bestir themselves to the work. This second alternative they will never adopt so speedily as not to be even now deservedly condemned for not adopting sooner. But those persons, whoever they be, who under the pretext of a general council interpose delay, clearly have no other view and in view than by this artifice to spin out the time, and are no more to be listened to than if they confessed in word what they indeed should demonstrate, that they are prepared to purchase their private advantage by the destruction of the church.

But it is said that it would be unprecedented for the Germans alone to undertake this reformation, that in no case when controversy has arisen concerning the doctrines of religion was it ever heard that a single province could undertake the investigation and decision. What is this I hear? Do they imagine that by their mere assertions they will persuade the world to believe what the histories of all times repute? As often as some new heresy emerged or the church was disturbed by some dispute, was it not the usual custom immediately to convene a provincial synod that the disturbance might thereby be terminated? It never was the custom to recur to a general council until the other remedy had been tried. Before bishops from the whole Christian world met at night to confute areas, several synods had been held with that view in the east.

For the sake of brevity I pass over the other instances, but the thing which our enemies shun as unusual is proved by the writings of the ancients to have been the ordinary practice. Have done, then, with this lying pretense of novelty. Had this superstitious idea possessed the African bishops, they would have been too late in meeting the Donatists and Pelagians.

The Donatists had already gained over a great part of Africa to their faction, nor was any place entirely free from the contagion. It was a controversy of the greatest moment relating to the unity of the church and the due administration of baptism. According to the new wisdom of our opponents, the Orthodox bishops, in order not to cut themselves off from the other members of the church, ought to have referred the question to a general council.

Is this what they do? Nay, rather, knowing that in extinguishing an actual fire no time can be lost, they press and follow close upon the Donatists, now summoning them to a synod, now coming, as it were, to close quarters with them in discussion. Let our enemies condemn of impious separation from the church Augustine and the other holy men of that age who concurred with him, for having by imperial authority, without convoking a general council, forced the Donatists to dispute with them, and hesitated not to treat in a provincial synod of the most difficult and dangerous controversy. There, too, Pelagius had shown his horns.

Instantly, a synod was held to repress his audacity, when, after having for a short time feigned penitence, he had returned to his vomit, with the stigma which had been fixed on his impiety in Africa, he betook himself to Rome, where he was received with considerable favour. What course do the pious bishops take? Do they allege that they are only a member of the church, and must wait for relief from a general council? Nay, they themselves assemble on the very first opportunity, and again and again anathematize the impious dogma with which many had now been infected, freely deciding and defining what ought to be held on the subjects of original sin and regenerating grace. Afterwards, indeed, they sent to Rome a copy

of their proceedings, partly that by a common authority and consent they may the more effectually crush the contumacy of the heretics, partly that they may admonish others of a danger against which all ought to stand upon their guard.

The flatterers of the Roman pontiff gave the matter a different turn, as if the bishops had suspended their judgment until the proceedings were ratified by Innocent V, who then presided over the church of Rome. But this impudent avertment is more than refuted by the words of the Holy Fathers, for they neither ask Innocent to counsel them as to what they ought to do, nor do they refer it to him to decide, nor do they wait for his nod in authority, but they narrate that they had already taken cognizance of the cause and past sentence, condemning both the man and the doctrine, in order that Innocent, too, might imitate their example if he desired not to fail in his duty. These things were done while as yet the churches agreed with each other in sound doctrine.

Now then, when all things threaten ruin, if not speedily remedied, why hang waiting for the consent of those who leave not a stone unturned to prevent the truth of God, which they had put to flight, from again beaming forth? This Reformation audio track is a production of Stillwater's Revival Books. You are welcome to make copies and give them to those in need. SWRB makes thousands of classic Reformation resources available, free and for sale, in audio, video, and printed formats.

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And remember that John Calvin, in defending the Reformation's regulative principle of worship, also called the scriptural law of worship, commenting on the words of God, which I commanded them not, neither came into my heart, from his commentary on Jeremiah 7:31, writes, God here cuts off from men every occasion for making evasions, since he has commanded them to worship God according to their own fancies, and attend not to his commands, they pervert true religion. And if this principle was adopted by the Papists, all those fictitious modes of superstitions, there is an immense number of them, as it is well known, and as it manifestly appears. Were they to admit this principle, that we cannot rightly worship God except by obeying his word, they would be delivered from their deep abyss of error.

The prophet's words, then, are very important, when he says that God had commanded no such thing, and that it never came to his mind, as though he had said that men assume too much wisdom when they devise what he never required, nay, what he never knew.

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