

Luther's Works, Volume 40

Church and Ministry II

Concerning the Ministry

1523

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Introduction

This treatise was written by Luther in 1523 to the Bohemian Christians, and addressed to the Senate in Prague. The circumstances attending its origin throw light on the nature of the contents.

Ever since the days of Huss the Bohemians had withstood Rome. Their insistence on receiving the sacrament in both kinds had given them the name Utraquists, and because the pope refused to sanction their position they had been in schism with Rome for a century. But they still held to most of the teachings of the Roman church and counted ordination as one of the sacraments. Since the pope refused them an archbishop, the archbishopric of Prague was vacant from 1421–1560, and a consistory with elected administrators ruled the churches. In order that the churches might have properly ordained pastors, candidates who had received instruction were sent to Italy where Italian bishops, mainly Venetian, ordained them, on the understanding they would administer communion at home only in one kind. On their return to Bohemia the newly ordained clergymen had to renounce this vow before the consistory if they wanted to serve a parish. It was clearly a subterfuge, but it enabled the Bohemians to keep up the semblance of having a regular ministry.

Luther had hoped that with their independent traditions the Bohemians would become his allies in the contest with Rome. In 1522 he had written to one of the Bohemian nobles, Graf Schlick, whose estates were on the border of Germany, urging the leaders of the nation to remain true to their Hussite heritage. In 1523, probably during the summer, a Bohemian clergyman, Gallus Cahera, appeared in Wittenberg. Cahera was a contentious and ambitious person. He led Luther to believe that Bohemia was inclining to the German reformer, and would be influenced by his words. Luther later complained that he was driven by Cahera to write and advise the Bohemians what to do in their difficult situation. He wrote this treatise and in it reproached them for their compromising with Rome. He showed the right of the congregations to elect their own pastors, when the superiors were not interested in the Word. He advised the Bohemians to have nothing to do with foreign bishops whose ordination they could accept only with a bad conscience.

Cahera returned to Prague and seemed to enjoy success with his backing by Luther. He became administrator in Prague, and wanted the Bohemians to go farther in their reformation. But when he detected this was an unpopular move, he swung around to the Roman position and joined in the denunciation of the new measures as a German, and foreign innovation. The friends of Luther were deposed, and the Utraquists again sought agreement with Rome. What had seemed in the summer of 1523 to be a dawn of an evangelical day in Bohemia had turned by the summer of 1524 into a day of bitter disappointment for Luther. For in the former year Cahera had painted a bright picture for Luther; in the latter, the pastor of the Bethlehem Church of Prague was a refugee in Wittenberg. In 1525 the Bohemians openly declared their hostility to the conception of the ministry Luther had described in his treatise.

The Latin work was published late in 1523. It was immediately translated by Paul Speratus who had been a pastor in Moravia and was now in Wittenberg, where he was to enrich the Reformation by his contribution to hymnody.

The Latin text of the translation appears in *WA* 12, 169–195. The German translation, prepared by Speratus, appears in *St. L.* 10, 1548ff.

Concerning the Ministry

To the Illustrious Senate and People of Prague,

from Martin Luther, Preacher at Wittenberg.

Grace and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Often and by many correspondents I have been asked to write to you, honored sirs, concerning the calling and ordination of a pastor of the church. Now at last the law of love will not allow me to decline any longer. Though I know it is beyond my ability, and that I have more duties at home than one man can be equal to, yet your situation and need are such that love must be undaunted, assured that it can do all things by His power who works in love. What I have, therefore, I give you, but with the understanding that each and all of you may use his own judgment. For my ministry does not allow me to go beyond what someone else asks. I am not an authority on something new. I only give my counsel and encouragement. But the Lord, who initiated and gave you the desire to ask and seek my advice, will fulfil and accomplish what you seek and intend, in full and rich measure to the praise of his grace and gospel. To Him be glory forever and ever.

A Warning

To begin with I freely confess that in this book I will disappoint all who may hope that I will endorse or amend the rite and custom hitherto prevailing of priestly tonsure and anointing. Such religion, or superstition, I will allow them to enjoy, however common, traditional, or vaunted it may be. We are interested in the pure and true course, prescribed in holy Scripture, and are little concerned about usage or what the fathers have said or done in this matter. We have already sufficiently made clear that herein we neither ought, should, nor would be bound by human traditions, however sacred and highly regarded, but clearly exercise our reason and Christian liberty, as it is written, “All things are yours, whether Peter or Paul, but you are Christ’s” [1 Cor. 3:22, 23].

An Exhortation Against Receiving Papal Ordination

But before we come to our manner of appointment, that is, the Christian form, it is proper and fair to consider the papal consecrations (as they call them) and to expose publicly the abomination of their order, so that its “iniquity may be found out and hated” [Ps. 36:2] and those who yet adhere closely to it may the more easily be persuaded to desist therefrom. And to begin with minor factors we would first present the reasons why you in Bohemia have been distressed in a special way, more than other peoples.

When Satan got the upper hand and the bishops and priests (as they are called) deserted the Bohemian kingdom, leaving it devastated and isolated, the Roman bishops laid on you the hard and dire necessity of sending your clerics annually to Italy to purchase papal ordination. For your neighboring bishops would not at all condescend to ordain them, since they considered you obstinate heretics. And what inconvenience and danger this need has caused you! I pass over

what you have had to endure in body and goods, your exhaustion by such toil of journey, and by expense among strangers, even enemies, and the diseases, evil customs, and ruined conscience with which you return, in order to govern yourselves. A cause of greater misery is the fact that the pacts and dishonest circumstances force you to purchase ordination from your tyrant and his executioners, the bishops, through a violation of conscience, so that not a single one of you can ever rejoice in good conscience that you have entered the sheep-fold by the door [John 10:1]. Always and alone to be afflicted with such pastors as have entered in some other way than through the door is the greatest hardship.

For this reason, unfortunately, an opportunity is given a scamp, or apostate, or such as no other part of the world would tolerate, to enter into your ministry. Indeed this plight of yours has given rise to a proverb, namely, that one who has earned the noose or the wheel among the Germans qualifies as priest among the Bohemians. So Bohemia has had to harbor eminent scoundrels, ignorant pastors, even rapacious wolves. Meanwhile, what concern has it been of the Holy Father in Rome in what ways the Bohemians were destroyed? He has looked on it as a great concession to purchase through such favors freedom and license for these pests and beasts to attack you. For though he was in a position to spare you these pests, yet the love of money prevails and in his mercy he sells his consecrations to heretics and to his enemies.

Hence arise the chaos and Babylonian confusion in your celebrated kingdom. Since you must have a ministry but have no means of correcting abuses, each one teaches what he wishes, one preaches this, another that, some deceive the people with the assumed title of priest, some purchase parishes, others force their way in, a successor upsets the work of his predecessor. In the absence of any form or basis of a valid ministry, we see noble Bohemia transformed into a Babylonia described by Isaiah, in which satyrs dance, and howling creatures and sorceresses answer each other [Isa. 13:21, 22]. What wonder, then, if in this confusion the people of Bohemia become nothing but schismatics, and no certain basis of faith or life exists, and the ministry seems to be one of perdition?

These atrocious and cruel conditions ought in all justice compel us, with one accord, to rid all Bohemia of these monsters. Clearly if misfortune and need are so great that they can secure ministers in no other way [than by subterfuge], I would confidently advise that you have no ministers at all. For it would be safer and more wholesome for the father of the household to read the gospel and, since the universal custom and use allows it to the laity, to baptize those who are born in his home, and so to govern himself and his according to the doctrine of Christ, even if throughout life they did not dare or could not receive the Eucharist. For the Eucharist is not so necessary that salvation depends on it. The gospel and baptism are sufficient, since faith alone justifies and love alone lives rightly.

Surely if in this way two, three, or ten homes, or a whole city, or several cities agreed thus among themselves to live in faith and love by the use of the gospel in the home, and even if no ordained man, shorn or anointed, ever came to them or in any other way was placed over them as minister to administer the Eucharist and other sacraments, Christ without a doubt would be in their midst and would own them as his church. Christ would not only not condemn, but surely would reward a pious and Christian abstinence from all the other sacraments when these would

be offered by impious and sacrilegious men. For He himself said “One thing only is necessary” [Luke 10:42], the Word of God, in which man has his life. For if he lives in the Word and has the Word, he is able to forego all else in order to avoid the teachings and ministries of impious men. And what would it avail to have all other things, but not the Word by which one lives? The mercenary papists who have intruded themselves ply their trade of consecrations, so that while the sacraments are here the Word does not exist in Bohemia. That is, they deprive you of essentials and lord it over you in nonessentials.

The father in the home, on the other hand, can provide his own with the necessities through the Word and in pious humility do without the nonessentials as long as he is in captivity. In this regard we follow the custom and law of the Jewish captives who were not able to be in Jerusalem or to make offering there. Upheld in their faith alone by the Word of God they passed their lives among enemies while yearning for Jerusalem. So in this ease the head of the household suffering under the tyranny of the pope would act most appropriately and safely if while longing for the Eucharist, which he neither would dare nor could receive, in the meantime zealously and faithfully propagated faith in his home through the Word of God until God on high in his mercy either brought the captivity to an end or sent a true minister of the Word. So, I hold, it is better to have none than to have a minister who is guilty of sacrilege, impiety, and crime, and comes as a thief and robber only to kill and destroy [John 10:10].

But now, thanks be to God, this condition is grievous and inevitable only in the ease of the weak and over-scrupulous. The others who have faith and know the truth, possess full freedom and means to drive away unworthy ministers and to call and appoint only such worthy and devout men as they choose. For by a pretty invention, of which only the man of sin is capable [2 Thess. 2:3], the papal theory perpetuates its ministry through an *indelible character* and safeguards it against removal by any kind of wrongdoing. In this way the pope establishes his tyranny and confirms the commission of sin with impunity while no freedom is given to choose better men and we are forced to endure evil men. But of this we shall speak a little later. Now that we have directed attention to your suffering of evils in Bohemia and urged you to forego papal ordinations I add a general reason to arouse you and all the world to abstain from the stench and apostasy of these offensive and abominable ordinations.

For the time being I will concede the papal ordinations whereby those whom they call priests are anointed and appointed by the authority of the bishop alone without any consent or election by the people over whom they are to be placed. Yet, since they are a people of God it is due them that no one be set over them without their election, and the bishop ought to confirm no one whom they did not know and approve of as suitable. But now those who are ordained are mostly without certain call and no one knows whose minister he is to be. Consequently the majority are ordained only, as they say, to benefices, in order to offer mass only, and the people have no idea whom the bishop anoints as their pastor. Yet, I say, I am willing to overlook this grievous error in papal ordinations, for a time.

Everyone who loves Christ ought to shudder before this situation and rather endure any suffering than to be ordained by the papists since everything in those ordinations is done and performed in greatest perverseness and impiety. Were they not performed in blindness and senselessness they

might seem to be a deliberate mockery in the face of God. Ordination indeed was first instituted on the authority of Scripture, and according to the example and decrees of the Apostle, in order to provide the people with ministers of the Word. The public ministry of the Word, I hold, by which the mysteries of God are made known, ought to be established by holy ordination as the highest and greatest of the functions of the church, on which the whole power of the church depends, since the church is nothing without the Word and everything in it exists by virtue of the Word alone. But my papists do not even dream of this in their ordinations. What is it they do?

In the first place they have been struck by blindness so that they do not even recognize what the Word or what the ministry of the Word is. This is especially true of the bishops who do the ordaining. How then is it possible for them to provide ministers of the Word by their ordinations? In place of ministers of the Word they only ordain priestly functionaries who offer up masses and hear confessions. For this is what the bishop means by giving the chalice into the hands of the candidate and giving him the power of consecrating, and sacrificing for the living and the dead. This indeed is a power that angels never could glory in, nor could the virgin mother of God possess it, but they have it though they be more impure than seducers and thieves. And thus in a most holy mysterious manner the bishop breathes in their ears and makes them father confessors, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Such is this most glorious power of consecration and absolution.

You would say that I exaggerate and lie if I claimed you could find one person ordained in their manner who dared assert that by such ordination he was commanded to communicate the mysteries of Christ and teach the gospel and rule the church which he obtained with his own blood [Acts 20:28]. Clearly no one ever hears this nor thinks that it concerns him. The chalice of course he accepts and thinks that all his ordination means is that he is permitted to consecrate and sacrifice Christ in the mass, and to hear confessions. Indeed he is concerned about his title to a benefice so as to feed his stomach, but otherwise he considers nothing at all beyond the sacrifice of masses—thus all the obligations of ordination are fulfilled. Whoever performs this, he is an ordained priest of the church and no one but him has this power. Anointing by the fingers and the tonsure of the head bear witness of this fact.

As to the call of a parish, or of a magistrate, to the ministry of the Word, this is considered by them as a rather recent and certainly incomparably minor obligation, compared to their sacred order and character. Their pastors and bishops and their high officials do not think they should be bothered by this kind of work, but turn it over to the lowest, meanest, vilest, and most ignorant. It is by far the meanest and most inexpert task, since communicating the mysteries of God and tending souls is of course an office lacking *indelible character* or the sacrament of ordination. But to consecrate Christ and sacrifice him, that implies *character*, that truly evidences a sacramental order.

The wrath of God hovers over these ridiculous masks of bishops, not only because they despise the Word of God and replace it by the office of sacrifice, but also because they turn away from life-giving baptism, by which men are made alive and sanctified as reasonable souls unto eternal life. For they look on this sacrament as altogether unworthy and alien to their gem-studded mitres and golden mantles. But they consider it indeed fitting to baptize, not souls, but stones,

altars, bells, dead and inanimate objects, as receptive of baptism as they themselves are of truth. So great is their madness and foolishness that you would faint from laughter were you not to regard with seriousness a bishop who toys with such things. But if you were to regard this in spirit as blasphemy you might explode in indignation.

If any are to be denied the name of priests, then above all those anointed by papal ordinations should be rejected. From the foregoing it is sufficiently clear that the papal bishops could in no way act as if they were ordaining to the ministry of the Word, but only to the sacrifice of masses and the hearing of confessions. For they are not able to act otherwise than as they really intend to act, namely, they are not concerned about the office of teaching, but confer the power of sacrificing and of hearing confession of sins. Consequently there is nothing else those ordained can obtain. Since it is most certain that the mass is not a sacrifice, therefore, their confession, which they would make compulsory, is nothing, and both are but a human and sacrilegious invention and falsehood. It clearly follows that their sacred ordinations make no one a priest or minister in the eyes of God, but only confer a certain mask of falsehood and vanity so that they offer where there is no sacrifice, and grant absolution where there is no accusation. It is as if some actor laughed and gesticulated in an empty theater.

Such are the things which ought justly to move not only you in Bohemia but all pious hearts everywhere to tolerate anything rather than to be sullied by these sacrilegious ordinations. And they who already have been ordained should grieve that they thus have been misled through masks of falsehood. For if these ever rightly celebrated the mass or fulfilled the ministry of the church, it certainly was not by virtue of a sacred ordination, which is mere falsehood and derision of God, but by virtue of the faith and spirit of the church which has had to tolerate these masks in place of a true ministry. But now that the situation has been forced into the light, God is no longer to be mocked and derided, and we should flee these masks of falsehood as the most terrible pests of the soul and the most shameful disgrace of the church of God.

But he who came into the ministry through these masks, let him carry on, assume the office and administer it in a pure and worthy manner. Rejecting the office of sacrificing the mass, let him teach the Word of God and govern the church. This he can do while inwardly condemning and hating the anointing and the whole form of ordination by which he came into the office. For it is not necessary to leave the place of the ministry though you may have reached it by wrong and impious methods, as long as the mind has mended its ways and the method has been condemned.

Further, if these reigned priests and masquerading bishops plied their ordinations and sacrifices, either in a spirit of amusement or of seriousness, so as not directly to oppose the gospel, and at least would leave us Christ inviolate in his kingdom, maybe their arrogance would be the less reprehensible and their temerity might be tolerated. But now their madness and senselessness is such that Christ must be denied and altogether rejected so that their sacrifices and offices might survive. I have abundantly showed this elsewhere but it will not hurt to repeat some of it here.

The gospel and all of Scripture present Christ as the high priest, who alone and once for all by offering himself has taken away the sins of all men and accomplished their sanctification for all eternity. For once and for all he entered into the holy place through his own blood, thus securing

an eternal redemption [Heb. 9:12, 28; 10:12, 14]. Thus no other sacrifice remains for our sins than his, and, by putting our trust altogether in it, we are saved from sin without any merits or works of our own. Of this sacrifice and offering he has instituted a perpetual remembrance in that he intends to have it proclaimed in the sacrament of the altar and thereby have faith in it strengthened. But how can this be accomplished in the abomination of the papal ordinations?

But now as if his unique sacrifice were not enough, or as if he had not obtained an eternal redemption, they daily offer body and blood in innumerable places throughout the world. By this sacrifice they promise a remission of sins not eternal, but which is repeated every day. This abomination goes beyond all reason. What else is this than honoring the sacrifice of Christ in name only but in fact wholly rejecting and destroying it? For how is it possible that I should at the same time believe that I have eternal forgiveness of sins by the sacrifice of Christ and yet by a sacrifice repeated daily seek remission again and again? For if I believe that Christ offered once for all, has won for me perpetual forgiveness of sins, I cannot seek forgiveness anew by some other sacrifice. For if I seek forgiveness by a daily sacrifice there is no room for a faith that the unique sacrifice of Christ has taken away all my sins forever.

You see, thus, with what frightful perversity these sacrifices in the name of Christ completely deprive us of Christ and his kingdom and in his place give us their own work, their sacrifice, their invention, just as Christ predicted that the abomination would stand in the holy place [Matt. 24:15]. Here the words of Christ hold true in mighty fashion: “Many will come in my name, saying ‘I am the Christ’ ” [Matt. 24:5]. But are not these counterfeiting Christ who by their daily repeated sacrifices in so many thousands of places promise that which Christ alone by his sacrifice once for all effected? Is not this to remove faith from the rock of truth which is in Christ and to build on the sand of human falsehood?

We see, then, what kind of priests are created by papal ordinations—not indeed priests of God, but priests of Satan, such as trample down Christ and destroy his sacrifice, who in truth do business in his name but teach faith in their own sacrifices. So it is no longer a question of whether one should seek or receive holy orders from the papists, but it is a definite conclusion that no one confers holy orders and makes priests less than those under the papal dominion. A semblance, indeed, of ordination and of making priests is magnificently present but it behooves the king of semblance to grant nothing but semblance so as to guarantee his abominations. Therefore, our conscience and faith impel us, under penalty of God’s anathema, to guard against their ordination. Indeed consideration of our salvation necessarily compels us to abstain from their disgraceful and damnable ordinations. Woe to those then who knowingly and sagaciously consecrate themselves to this adversary of God and this Baal Peor.

These reasons surely ought to influence you Bohemians more than any other people. For not only is it as impious for you as for others in the sight of God to seek and receive ordinations from your foe, but also in the sight of men, for it was this foe that burnt John Huss and Jerome of Prague⁵ and many others, slandering your name. It is the same foe that wants always to extinguish you, who brands you as hateful heretic endlessly and in every way throughout the earth. You have had to withstand his plagueful attacks with the shedding of blood. Yet he has not repented of the bloody tyranny of his disgraceful acts, nor recanted of any victim innocently

condemned to bloody death, nor restored the sacrilegiously stolen name of Christian. It does not grieve him that so much German blood has been spilled against you, in vain and to the ruin of souls, because of his profane tyranny. Indeed so obstinate is he in brow and neck that even today he would like to see both yourselves and ourselves perish altogether and so not even the least spark of light remain to the honor of Christ.

To this date he holds under his futile and invalid ban King George and his family at Münsterberg, an eminent dukedom of Bohemia, and likewise many others. But it is well that the man of perdition be revealed [2 Thess. 2:3ff.] of whom Peter foretold that he would place kings and rulers under his curse without fear [2 Pet. 2:10; Jude 8]. We have, though, another bishop, who can bless where this one curses as it is written, "Let them curse, but do thou bless" [Ps. 109:28]. The ban of the pope on King George and the duchy of Münsterberg, and those who have suffered the same always will be and now are in the condition described by Solomon in Proverbs, "Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight" [Prov. 26:2]. But it will always be a cause of unusual glory before God that King George and his family more than other kings and princes of the earth have been cursed by an abusive see and by the son of cursing.

Will you then continue, people of Bohemia, needlessly to receive impious and hateful ordinations from so cruel and bloodthirsty and implacable a foe of yours or have anything to do with one who curses you and is an abomination before God and men? For if you do so, are you not in fact agreeing with and justifying one who condemns you? Are you not then condemning all the glorious resistance you have offered him and compromising yourselves? Do you not dishonor the pious blood of John Huss, innocently shed, and confess his death was deserved, as long as you kiss the hands of him who slew him and prostrate yourselves before the feet of him who spurns you and tortures you with unending shame?

How much better it would be if you separated yourselves so far from him that, if it were possible, you would not smell the foul odor of his name. When Paul commands us to avoid the fornicator and drunkard [Rom. 13:12, 13; Eph. 5:3f., 18], how much more all who confess Christ ought to avoid this most recent abomination which refuses to be controlled or corrected and lays waste on all sides!

Allow me, then, good sirs, first to plead with you, though your conscience and fear of God ought to impel you if you are unwilling, henceforth neither to seek nor receive ordinations from this son of perdition, even if he offers them. Much less ought you to receive anyone ordained by him, who comes to you with the name and mark of the beast [Rev. 19:20]. For unless we made this a first requirement, we would toil in vain, and in vain would seek ways in which to help you. Your far-famed resistance, truly a happy secession from Satan's rule, would then be only a semblance and pretense. For how can one enjoy far-spread fame for having rejected the papal yoke and yet admit no one to guide consciences other than the murderers and thieves who are a part of the tyranny one has cast off? Will not all the world conclude that all that you obtained for so much blood, so many perils, and by so great a disgrace of your Christian name, even suffering the name of heretics, was the title of rejectors of papal tyranny, while in fact you have reintroduced his tyranny over you? In that respect we stupid Germans suffer simple tyranny, inasmuch as we

endure that which the name implies, without having the title of rejectors of the pope. We cannot comfort ourselves with false glory, that is, deriving peculiar satisfaction from attributing to the infamous tyrant what is our own mockery.

But, someone says, “What method of appointing ministers shall we adopt? Necessity knows no law. We do not have priests and we cannot do without them.” Were this so, it would have been wiser to realize this, and so to feel, speak, and remark, before leaving the papacy. Or now, certainly, when liberty is gone, you should return quickly to the name of servitude from which you departed rather than to enjoy the title only of an asserted freedom, and to feed on empty air in a captivity doubly hard to bear. It remains therefore to face the issue squarely. Either we must learn how to provide ourselves with presbyters apart from papal tyranny, or if we are not willing to do so (though it is possible) we must give ourselves into captivity, resigned and willingly, and with full knowledge and purpose enter the service of the king of perdition, which the merciful Christ our Lord and Master prevent. Amen.

*A Priest is not identical with Presbyter or Minister—
for one is born to be priest, one becomes a minister.*

And here above all constancy in faith is required if through the power of the divine Word we are to rid ourselves of a widespread and long-standing offense, namely, that men call those priests who are so only through human error, and that they undertake to defend with unyielding obstinacy those whom the bishops have shorn and anointed. For by this deceptive name Satan has fraudulently found entrance and wreaks ruin on all sides with unbelievable madness. Taking seven spirits worse than himself he takes possession of the court and dwells there in peace [Luke 11:21, 26], so that no one has any other conception of the word priest than that monstrosity of shaving and anointing introduced by human brashness and superstition. You will not triumph over this scandalous condition unless with closed eyes you disregard usage, tradition, and great numbers, and with open ears heed only the Word of God.

First, regard as an unmovable rock that the New Testament knows of no priest who is or can be anointed externally. If there are such, they are imitators and idols. There is neither example nor command nor a simple word in Gospels or Epistles of the apostles in support of this vanity. They are established and brought in only by the kind of human invention of which Jeroboam once was guilty in Israel’s history [1 Kings 12:32f.]. For a priest, especially in the New Testament, was not made but was born. He was created, not ordained. He was born not indeed of flesh, but through a birth of the Spirit, by water and Spirit in the washing of regeneration [John 3:6f.; Titus 3:5f.]. Indeed, all Christians are priests, and all priests are Christians. Worthy of anathema is any assertion that a priest is anything else than a Christian. For such an assertion has no support in the Word of God and is based only on human opinions, on ancient usage, or on the opinions of the majority, any one of which is ineffectual to establish an article of faith without sacrilege and offense, as I have sufficiently shown elsewhere.

The scriptures of God, by which our consciences should be formed and confirmed as over against the shorn and the anointed and which hold that the Christians and they alone are priests, assert, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” [Ps. 110:4]. Christ himself was

neither shorn nor anointed with oil in order to become a priest. Therefore, it is not enough for anyone who follows Christ to be anointed in order to become a priest. But it is necessary that he have something far different and, possessing this, he needs no oil or tonsure. It is obvious that these pseudo-ordainers—the bishops—blaspheme and err in holding that their anointing and ordinations are so necessary that without them no one can be a priest, however holy he be, be he Christ himself. On the other hand they hold that such ceremonies make a priest even if the person be a worse character than Nero or Ashurbanipal.⁸

What else do they accomplish than a denial that Christ is a priest among his Christians? For in carrying on their hateful office they make no one a priest until he denies that he was a priest before. Thus in the very act of making him a priest they in fact remove him from his priesthood, so that before God their ordination is a mockery, but also a veritable and serious degradation. For to say, “I am ordained a priest,” is only to confess, “I was not, and am not now a priest.” It is just as great an abomination as when the monks vow obedience to “Evangelical Counsels,” and at the same time deny the commandments of God.

Furthermore, I shall also prove this conclusion to be trustworthy: Christ is a priest, therefore Christians are priests, as Psalm 22[:23] states: “I will tell of thy name to my brethren.” Again, “God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows” [Ps. 45:8]. That we are his brethren is true only because of the new birth. Wherefore we are priests, as he is Priest, sons as he is Son, kings as he is King. For he makes us to sit with him in heavenly places, as companions and co-heirs with him, in whom and with whom all things are given us. And many similar expressions indicate our oneness with Christ—one loaf, one cup, one body, members of his body, one flesh, bone of his bone, and we are told we have all things in common with him [Rom. 8:32; Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 10:17; Eph. 4:4; 5:30].

So it follows naturally that Christ has been made the first priest of the New Testament without shaving, without anointing, and so without any of their “character” or all the masquerade of episcopal ordination. He made all his apostles and his disciples priests, but through no such masks. So this mask of ordination is unnecessary. And if you have it, it is not enough in order to be a priest. Otherwise, you would have to confess that neither Christ nor the apostles were priests. You see how right I am saying that no one is less a priest than those today ordained as priests. For everything is left out by which Christ and his apostles were made priests, and only those things included which Christ and the apostles did without when they were made priests, and which make no priests. It is a lie which comes from their own brains when they maintain, “Thus you are created a priest, otherwise not.” This is as much as to say, “Christ was not shaved or anointed by us, therefore he is no priest.”

But let us go on and show from the priestly offices (as they call them) that all Christians are priests in equal degree. For such passages as, “You are a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2[:9]) and, “Thou has made them a kingdom and priests” (Rev. 5[:10]), I have sufficiently treated in other books. Mostly the functions of a priest are these: to teach, to preach and proclaim the Word of God, to baptize, to consecrate or administer the Eucharist, to bind and loose sins, to pray for others, to sacrifice, and to judge of all doctrine and spirits. Certainly these are splendid and royal duties. But the first and foremost of all on which everything else depends, is the teaching of the

Word of God. For we teach with the Word, we consecrate with the Word, we bind and absolve sins by the Word, we baptize with the Word, we sacrifice with the Word, we judge all things by the Word. Therefore when we grant the Word to anyone, we cannot deny anything to him pertaining to the exercise of his priesthood. This Word is the same for all, as Isaiah says, “All your sons shall be taught by the Lord” [Isa. 54:13]. They are taught by the Lord, who hear and learn from the Father, as Christ explains in John 6[:45]. And hearing is through the Word of Christ (Rom. 10[:17]) in order that the praise of Ps. 149[:9] may be realized: “This is glory for all his faithful ones.” For whom? “Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, to wreak vengeance on the nations and chastisement on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgment written” [Ps. 149:6f.].

The first office, that of the ministry of the Word, therefore, is common to all Christians. This is clear, from what I have already said, and from 1 Pet. 2[:9], “You are a royal priesthood that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” I ask, who are these who are called out of darkness into marvelous light? Is it only the shorn and anointed masks? Is it not all Christians? And Peter not only gives them the right, but the command, to declare the wonderful deeds of God, which certainly is nothing else than to preach the Word of God. But some imagine a twofold priesthood, one spiritual and common to all, the other external and limited, and say that Peter here speaks of the spiritual one. But what is the function of this limited and external office? Is it not to declare the wonderful deeds of God? But this Peter enjoins on the spiritual and universal priesthood. In truth these blasphemers have another, external, ministry in which they declare, not the wonderful deeds of God, but their own and the pope’s impious deeds. So, as there is no other proclamation in the ministry of the Word than that which is common to all, that of the wonderful deed of God, so there is no other priesthood than that which is spiritual and universal, as Peter here defines it.

Christ proves the same thing according to the account in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where he says to all at the Last Supper: “Do this in remembrance of me” [Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24]. For this he did not say only to the shorn and anointed, else only the shorn and anointed could receive the body and blood of the Lord. Even this remembrance is nothing else than a preaching of the Word, as Paul explains in 1 Cor. [11:26], “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” To proclaim the death of the Lord is to declare the wonderful deeds of God who called us from darkness into marvelous light. Here, thus, is nothing of the dreams of impious men who find herein that the apostles were made priests, that is, ordained with their masks. Christ here enjoined the same ministry of the Word on them all equally. All of them are given the right and command to hold the Lord in remembrance, so that God may be praised and glorified in his marvelous deeds. He means that we should remember him not by offering masses in hidden corners or by enforced meditations, but by a public ministry of the Word, for the salvation of those who hear.

Paul confirms this in 1 Cor. 14[:26] as he speaks not to the shorn or to a few, but to the whole church and each individual Christian: “Each one of you has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.” And further on: “For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all

may learn and all be encouraged” [1 Cor. 14:31]. For say, what is meant by “each one of you”? And by “all”? Can this mean only the shorn? These passages very strongly and clearly corroborate that the ministry of the Word is the highest office in the church, that it is unique and belongs to all who are Christians, not only by right but by command. Indeed it is not a priesthood if it is not unique and common to all. Nothing can prevail against these divine thunderings, be it numberless fathers, innumerable councils, the custom of ages, or a majority of all the world. For these are but as straws by which the shorn masqueraders strive to establish their priesthood.

The second function, to baptize, they themselves have by usage allowed in cases of necessity even to ordinary women, so that it is hardly regarded any more as a sacramental function. Whether they wish or not we deduce from their own logic that all Christians, and they alone, even women, are priests, without tonsure and episcopal “character.” For in baptizing we proffer the life-giving Word of God, which renews souls and redeems from death and sins. To baptize is incomparably greater than to consecrate bread and wine, for it is the greatest office in the church—the proclamation of the Word of God. So when women baptize, they exercise the function of priesthood legitimately, and do it not as a private act, but as a part of the public ministry of the church which belongs only to the priesthood.

The stupidity and senselessness of the papists here sufficiently reveals itself. For they permit the ministry of baptism to all, and yet consider the priesthood as their own property and baptism as impossible without their priests. They themselves have established it as the first sacrament and have permitted no one but priests to administer sacraments. But one sacrament cannot be of greater rank than another, since all are founded on the same Word of God. But their own blindness has deceived them, so that they do not see the majesty of the Word of God reigning in baptism. For if they had a right sense of values they would discern that no dignity, be it of priest, or bishop, or even of the pope, can compare with that which they attribute to the ministry of the Word. Small indeed appears the name of priest, or bishop, or pope as over against the name of minister of the Word of God, a Word that lives and remains forever, powerful and able to do all things.

There is something ridiculous about this conferring of orders. For the episcopal dignity is not a sacrament nor has it a “character.” Yet it gives a priestly dignity and power supposedly above all others. Though the episcopal authority ranks as the highest since it grants the ordination and “character” of a priest, it is at the same time inferior since it is not itself an order or in possession of a peculiar “character.” So the lesser bestows what is greater. And since it proved necessary to dress up this absurdity they created this fictitious distinction between dignity and power. What else was possible once the imprudent lie got started, but to continue to vacillate? Wherefore Christ predicted how all things in the papal realm would be guided by no consistent reason but overleap the bounds of common sense. So it is not surprising that they concede the priestly sacrament of baptism to all, yet lay claim to exclusive possession of the priesthood.

The third function is to consecrate or to administer the sacred bread and wine. Here those in the order of the shorn vaunt themselves and set themselves up as rulers of a power given neither to angels nor the virgin mother. Unmoved by their senselessness we hold that this function, too, like the priesthood, belongs to all, and this we assert, not on our own authority, but that of Christ who

at the Last Supper said, “Do this in remembrance of me” [Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24]. This is the word by means of which the shorn papists claim they can make priests and give them the authority to consecrate. But Christ spoke this word to all those then present and to those who in the future would be at the table, to eat this bread and drink this cup. So it follows that what is given here is given to all. Those who oppose this have no foundation on which to stand, except the fathers, the councils, tradition, and that strongest article of their faith, namely, “We are many and thus we hold: therefore it is true.”

A further witness is the word of Paul in 1 Cor. 11[:23], “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,” etc. Here Paul addresses all the Corinthians, making each of them, as he himself was, consecrators. But in this case so great a beam is in the eyes of the papists [Matt. 7:3] that they do not see the majesty of the Word of God, but only stand in awe before the transubstantiation of the bread. Yet I ask you, what is this splendid power of consecration, compared to the power of baptizing and of proclaiming the Word? A woman can baptize and administer the Word of life, by which sin is taken away, eternal death abolished, the prince of the world cast out, heaven bestowed; in short by which the divine majesty pours itself forth through all the soul. Meanwhile this miracle-working priest changes the nature of the bread, but by no other or greater word or power, and it has no other effect than that it increases his awe and admiration before his own dignity and power. Is not this to make an elephant out of a fly? What wonder workers! In despising the power of the Word they make marvelous their own power.

Furthermore we note how seldom the Evangelists and Apostles make mention of the Eucharist, a fact that has led many to wish they had said more about it. On the other hand they ceaselessly emphasize, even to the point of weariness, the ministry of the Word. It is as if the Spirit had foreseen these coming abuses and errors of the shorn ones which would turn the heart from the Word of power and truth to that futile change of bread and wine, all through life clinging to these outward appearances while rejecting the marvelous light into which we have been called. If then that which is greatest, namely, Word and baptism, is conferred on all, then it can rightly be maintained that the lesser, the power to consecrate, is also so conferred, even if there be no direct authority of Scripture. Just as Christ proclaimed, “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” [Matt. 6:25], implying, if God gives the greater how much more would he give the lesser?

The fourth function consists in binding and loosing from sin. Not only have they appropriated this function arrogantly to themselves, but from it drawn the conclusion boastfully that to them alone is given the power of establishing laws. For “to bind,” they claim, means to make laws, to prohibit, and to command. It becomes indeed a binding of consciences, though falsely and deceitfully, for they bind when there is no reason for it, as in the case of prohibition of marriage and of certain foods, though both have the sanction of God’s creation. To absolve, again, among them means to take money for making dispensations in regard to their stipulations and false laws, so that they deceitfully forgive what they have falsely imposed on consciences. They make use of the office of binding and loosing also in confessions and excommunications, though this practice is invalid in law and an abuse to be condemned.

By this theft and impious embezzlement they have brought it about that the office of the keys, or of binding and loosing, is never less used than among themselves. They never employ the keys to open or close heaven to consciences, but they do use them to regulate the money pouches of all the earth. But this office of the keys belongs to all of us who are Christians, as I have so often proved and shown in my books against the pope. For the word of Christ in Matt. 18[:15] is addressed not only to the Apostles, but, certainly, to all the brethren: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault ... if he listens to you, you have gained your brother." And, further on, "If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" [Matt. 18:17, 18].

We need pay no attention to the bogey man of these masqueraders when they distinguish between the power of the keys and the use of the keys, a distinction based on no Scripture but on their own recklessness alone. As usual they beg the question. For when it is incumbent on them to show that they have a power different from that given the whole church, they rush on as if this were already demonstrated, and then go on to this fictitious distinction that the power of the keys belongs to the church, their use, however, to the bishops. This is trifling, and the argument has nothing to support it. Christ gives both the power and the use of the keys to each Christian, when he says, "Let him be to you as a Gentile" [Matt. 18:17]. For who is this "you" to whom Christ refers when he says, "Let him be to you"? The pope? Indeed, he refers to each and every Christian. And in saying, "Let him be to you," he gives not only the authority, but also commands its use and exercise. For what else does the phrase, "Let him be to you as a Gentile," mean than to have nothing to do with him, to have no fellowship with him. This truly is to excommunicate, to bind, and to close the door of heaven.

This is confirmed by what follows: "Whatever you bind ... shall be bound." Who are those addressed? Are they not all Christians? Is it not the church? If here the giving of the keys to the church means not the use but only the authority, we would by the same source claim that its use has never been given to anyone, even to Peter (Matt. 16[:19]). For clearly the words of Christ are everywhere the same when he bestows the office of binding and loosing. If in one place or with reference to one person they signify a conferring of authority, they signify a conferring of authority everywhere. If they signify the conferring of the use in one place, they signify the conferring of the use everywhere. For the words of God are everywhere the same and we are not permitted to give them one meaning in one place and another meaning elsewhere, though these masks make bold to ridicule the mysteries of God with their fictions.

So the lies of men are of no avail. The keys belong to the whole church and to each of its members, both as regards their authority and their various uses. Otherwise we do violence to the words of Christ, in which he speaks to all without qualification or limitation: "Let him be to you," and "You will have gained your brother," and "Whatever you," etc. And the words which were spoken alone to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven," here find their confirmation. This word also, "If two of you agree on earth," and "Where two are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them" [Matt. 18:19, 20]. In all of these declarations we find established the fullest authority and the most immediate exercise of the right to bind and to

absolve. Were this not true we would be denying to Christ himself the right and use of the keys as he dwells among even a couple of his disciples. But this indeed I have abundantly elaborated elsewhere.

As we have declared already, the ministry of the Word belongs to all. To bind and to loose clearly is nothing else than to proclaim and to apply the gospel. For what is it to loose, if not to announce the forgiveness of sins before God? What is it to bind, except to withdraw the gospel and to declare the retention of sins? Whether they want to or not [they must concede] that the keys are an exercise of the ministry of the Word and belong to all Christians.

Yet what is the use of struggling to secure this office for us who know Christ? It is clear enough that among the papists the knowledge of Christ, faith, and the gospel are altogether unknown, and at present even damned. When faith is lacking and Christ is ignored, it is impossible to see what is and is not sin before God. For the blindness of unbelief forces them to call evil good and good evil, and to lose their way altogether. If we do not know the difference between sin and good works we cannot loose or bind. So if we want to speak and feel as followers of Christ, we must hold that the papists and the shorn sacrificers, as long as they persist in their contention, cannot possess the function of binding and loosing or even be priests, much less be the only ones who have this office or who confer it on anyone by their ordinations. What will you bind when you do not know what should be bound? So their blindness leads them on in their fury. They close heaven and open hell to themselves and theirs. By their binding they despise the gospel and by their loosing they exalt their own traditions. They have lost both the authority and the use of the keys by their perverse and impious abuse.

The fifth function is to sacrifice. This is the crown of glory of the drunkards of Ephraim [Isa. 28:1]. By this they have separated themselves from us and stupified the whole earth. Supporting themselves only by foolish and absurd lies they have made a sacrifice out of a sacrament. Of this I have already spoken, so I can pass over it briefly. We call as witness the writings of the New Testament, to which we appeal in opposing Satan, and assert that in the New Testament there is no sacrifice except the one which is common to all, namely the one described in Rom. 12[:1], where Paul teaches us to present our bodies as a sacrifice, just as Christ sacrificed his body for us on the cross. In this sacrifice he includes the offering of praise and thanksgiving. Peter likewise commands in 1 Pet. 2[:5] that we offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, that is, ourselves, not gold or animals.

Therefore that which they boast of as a singular sacrifice is indeed a singular sacrifice of a singular priesthood, but of a kind in which no Christian could or should in any way wish to be a participant. He should, on the contrary, denounce such participation as idolatry and a most blasphemous abuse and pray to be as far removed as possible from a part in it, however ancient and universal they allege it to be. For he does not less err who errs along with many others, nor will he burn less who burns with many. So be firm and unmoved on this point: in the church there is only this sacrifice, namely, our body. For today no other sacrifice is possible than that which is sacrificed and perfected by the Word of God, and since the Word (as we said) is common to all, the sacrifice too must be one pertaining to all.

Now since there can be only spiritual sacrifices in the church, as Peter says, that is, such as are in spirit and in truth, they can be offered only by one who is spiritual, that is, by a Christian who has the Spirit of Christ. But the papists enjoy their own fabrication and quibble that their sacrifice can be performed even by those who are criminals, and in no sense spiritual. They think that their sacrifices effect grace by the doing of the act of sacrifice itself and not by the person doing it (*opere operati, non operantis*). They are led to defend such abominable sacrilege by arguing that God regarded favorably the sacrifice of Cain even if he did not so regard Cain as a person. Defending their own sacrifices they say that a sacrifice is an external work, even if offered by one who is damned and unacceptable. But in the church nothing at all counts unless the person first be acceptable, as Abel was, and he was in God's favor not by sacrifice, but by faith and spirit. So they must confess that since their sacrificing priests to a large extent are not spiritual, and that they are not sacrificing priests in the church unless they are spiritual, their sacrifice clearly is not one that belongs to the church but to the realm of human falsehood.

The sixth function is to pray for others. How horribly and shamelessly these masks have deceived the world and made a sort of fictitious synagogue out of the true church is a grievous story. For Christ gave the Lord's Prayer to all his Christians. By this alone we are sufficiently able to prove and confirm that the priesthood is one and the same to all, whereas the papal priesthood is a falsehood devised outside the church of God and through mere effrontery brought into the church. To pray for others is to go between and make intercession of God, which is befitting Christ only and all his brethren. Though the papists earnestly desire that those be called priests who pray for lay Christians, they but worship a Dagon and a god of their stomachs. But since we are commanded to pray for all certainly all are equally commanded to function as priests.

It is hard to know whether these masks have been unwilling to test the power and function of this Lord's Prayer through ignorance or through arrogance. For they too preach that it is given to all, and yet they have arrogated the function or priesthood of prayer to themselves alone, depriving others of it. For what does it mean to say, "We alone are priests, you are lay," except, "We alone are Christians and can pray. You are Gentiles who cannot pray but can be aided by our prayers"? And to say, "You also ought to pray, not only we," does this not mean, "You too are priests and brethren of Christ, able to stand for others in the presence of God"?

Just indeed are the judgments of God on these shameful intercessors! Behold, they want to be regarded as the only ones who pray for the people. But by a marvelous counsel of God they are turned into a kind of imaginary picture of intercessors, so that this iniquity which they thought would deceive God and men is made to deceive only themselves. For who really prays in all this great number of chapters, monasteries, and benefices? The words of prayer indeed roll over their lips, and they think they have the musical instruments of David [Neh. 12:36; Amos 6:5], but as Amos says, God himself rejects the noise of their songs [Amos 5:23], and avers, "This people ... honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me" [Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8].

So you will find many of them who for forty years or all through their lives have rolled off their lips the sacred words of prayer, but never for a moment have really offered a single prayer before God. And such perverse persons are supposed to be worthy of the name of priests. For them we

are to provide such massive churches, such outlays and revenues, and to them we are to subordinate kingdoms of all the world and even the true priests and intercessors before God, namely the Christians, for whom they were to pray. Yet God would not consider them worthy of comparison even with the heathen, who hope to be heard for the sake of their many words [Matt. 6:7]. But these indeed do not even mean or hope to be heard, nor do they carry on their barrage of incessant words in order to be heard, but that they may honor God with their lips and by this show win the dues of the multitudes to fatten their stomachs. By the pope's authority, though, they are the priests of God, priests indeed of Satan, who is the god of this age, and they pray for us, to bring the judgment of the true God on us.

But let us listen to Christ, the Judge and Arbiter in this case: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth ... for such the Father seeks to worship him [John 4:23, 24], that is, not such as pray on this mountain or in Jerusalem. Since this final and sovereign judgment prevails we maintain our position confidently, and assured by divine authority we adjudge that the pope and his minions have indeed a singular priesthood and singular office of intercession for all Christians, but instead of a genuine priesthood and intercession theirs is a masquerade and a counterfeit priesthood and intercession. Furthermore, only Christians and all those who cry in spirit, "Abba, Father" [Rom. 8:15], are genuine in their prayer and they alone are priests.

The seventh and last function is to judge and pass on doctrines. Clearly it is not without good reason that the mask priests and counterfeit Christians have claimed this office for themselves. For they could foresee that if they allowed all to have this function they could not monopolize any of the aforementioned privileges. If you could deprive the hearers of this function, what would not a teacher be able and dare to do, even surpassing Satan himself if he could? On the other hand if the hearers are permitted, even bidden to exercise this function, what would a teacher be able or try to do even if he were greater than an angel in heaven? If this is granted, Paul could not only correct Peter, but even pronounce anathema on angels from heaven [Gal. 2:14; 1:8]. With what fear and trembling bishops and councils would have spoken and issued decrees, if the judgment of hearers would have had to be regarded when decisions were made with respect to priesthood, to the office of teaching, of baptizing, of consecrating, of sacrificing, of binding, of prayer, of judging doctrine. Indeed, there never would have been a universal papacy if this right of judgment had prevailed. They took good counsel when they monopolized this office!

But they have succeeded and prevailed until, as Daniel says, the indignation is accomplished [Dan. 11:36]. But now we see the light of the advent of the Savior and the destruction of this lawless one begins, for the spirit of His voice stays the adversary who has exalted himself against every worship of God [2 Thess. 2:3, 2:4]. Now the word of Christ in John 10[:27, 5] applies: "My sheep hear my voice. They do not know the voice of strangers," and in Matt. 7[:15], "Beware of false prophets," and Matt. 16[:6; Luke 12:1], "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," which is hypocrisy, and in Matt. 28[:2f.], "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do." By these and many similar passages of the gospel, even all of Scripture, we are admonished not to believe

false teachers. What else does this mean than that each of us shall have regard for his own salvation and be sure of Him in whom he believes and whom he follows? Each is a most free judge of all who teach him, if he himself is inwardly taught of God, as John 6[:45] says. For you will not be damned or saved by the teaching of another, be it true or false, but by your faith alone. Anyone may teach as he pleases, but what you believe is your responsibility whether it result in your peril or your benefit.

But Paul has bound this strong man in his own place and taken away his armor [Luke 11:22] when he said, “If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent” [1 Cor. 14:30], and again, “The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” [1 Cor. 14:32]. Also, “You can all prophesy, one by one” [1 Cor. 14:31]. What sense is there to this drunken prattle of the pope and his papists, though handed down over many generations: “We command, we earnestly direct, the Church of Rome is Mistress of the churches and the articles of faith”? All right, let her sit and teach and be a mistress, yet here she is commanded to be silent, if a revelation is made to one sitting by. Not only she, but each of us, one by one, may prophesy, says Paul, a master and corrector even of Peter when he acted insincerely [Gal. 2:14ff.]. How much more ought we not then confidently judge the church of Rome in its insincerity and reigned authority. We are not to be judged by this church lest we imperil our own salvation and be found to deny Christ.

How attractive this wisdom of the masks appear, by which they horribly contradict themselves while they oppose God and all that belongs to God! We believe that they believe, at least we see them professing and boasting that they are the leaders and shepherds of the Christian people. But I believe they will also be forced to confess that a Christian is one who has the Holy Spirit, and who as Christ says, is taught all things by the Spirit [John 14:26]. And John writes, “His anointing teaches you about everything” [1 John 2:27], that is, to put it briefly, a Christian is so certain about what he ought and ought not believe that he will even die, or at least be prepared to die, for it. Now I ask you, what effrontery it is of the papists to vaunt themselves and say: “The laity ought to believe us and not themselves”? What is this but to assert: “We admit that Christians have the Holy Spirit by which they know with certainty what is to be believed and what not to be believed; yet, because the Holy Spirit is inferior to ourselves, and we are much more learned than the Spirit, therefore they ought to subject themselves to us and heed us”?

By this reasoning they have wanted to set themselves up as masters with power to teach however they please and without respect to the judgment of any one else. Once this was granted them they could easily usurp all authority of God or man and obviously become gods. But we have this word: “For you have one Master, Christ. You are all brethren” [Matt. 23:8, 10]. We have then altogether the same rights. For if we have in common the name of brethren, then one cannot be especially superior to the other or enjoy more of heritage or authority than the other in spiritual matters, of which we now are speaking. So not only do we have the right to recover this function of judging doctrine, as well as all the other functions we have mentioned, but unless we recover it we are denying Christ as a brother. For here we are dealing not with a matter that is optional or permissible, but with a command and a necessity. Condemned is he who recognizes the tyranny of the pope, but blessed is he who rejects it in a pious apostasy.

It is of the common rights of Christians that we have been speaking. For since we have proved all of these things to be the common property of all Christians, no one individual can arise by his own authority and arrogate to himself alone what belongs to all. Lay hold then of this right and exercise it, where there is no one else who has the same rights. But the community rights demand that one, or as many as the community chooses, shall be chosen or approved who, in the name of all with these rights, shall perform these functions publicly. Otherwise, there might be shameful confusion among the people of God, and a kind of Babylon in the church, where everything should be done in order, as the Apostle teaches [1 Cor. 14:40]. For it is one thing to exercise a right publicly; another to use it in time of emergency. Publicly one may not exercise a right without consent of the whole body or of the church. In time of emergency each may use it as he deems best.

Now let us approach the papist priests and ask them to show us if their priesthood has other functions than these. If they have others theirs is not a Christian priesthood. If they have what we have described theirs is not a peculiar priesthood. So we judge, regardless of their contention, that either they have no other priesthood than that which the laity possesses, or they have a priesthood of Satan. For Christ teaches us to judge all trees by their fruits [Matt. 7:17f.]. We have seen what the fruits of our common priesthood are. So let them either show us other fruits than these or admit that they are not priests. For a difference in public or in private use of the kind of fruits does not prove that it is a different function or priesthood, but means only another function and another use of the same priesthood. As for shaving, anointing and a long cloak being signs of their peculiar priesthood we are willing to let them boast of these mean things, for we know it would be quite easy to shave, anoint, and clothe in a long robe even a pig or a block of wood.

Here we take our stand: There is no other Word of God than that which is given all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. There is no other remembrance of the Lord's Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted. There is no other kind of sin than that which any Christian can bind or loose. There is no other sacrifice than of the body of every Christian. No one but a Christian can pray. No one but a Christian may judge of doctrine. These make the priestly and royal office. Let therefore the papists either prove other functions of the priesthood or let them resign their own. Shaving, anointing, putting on of vestments, and other rites arising out of human superstition, do not convince us otherwise, even were they given by angels from heaven. Much less are we affected by the arguments of ancient use, the opinion of the majority, or of the authority which has been recognized.

On this account I think it follows that we neither can nor ought to give the name priest to those who are in charge of Word and sacrament among the people. The reason they have been called priests is either because of the custom of heathen people or as a vestige of the Jewish nation. The result is greatly injurious to the church. According to the New Testament Scriptures better names would be ministers, deacons, bishops, stewards, presbyters (a name often used and indicating the older members). For thus Paul writes in 1 Cor. 4:1], "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." He does not say, "as priests of Christ," because he knew that the name and office of priest belonged to all. Paul's frequent use of the

word “stewardship” or “household,” “ministry,” “minister,” “servant,” “one serving the gospel,” etc., emphasizes that it is not the estate, or order, or any authority or dignity that he wants to uphold, but only the office and the function. The authority and the dignity of the priesthood resided in the community of believers.

In this view of the ministry, the so-called “indelible character” vanishes and the perpetuity of the office is shown to be fictitious. A minister may be deposed if he proves unfaithful. On the other hand he is to be permitted in the ministry as long as he is competent and has the favor of the church as a whole, just as in civil matters any administrator is treated as an equal among his brethren. In fact a spiritual minister is more readily removable than any civil administrator, since if he is unfaithful he should be less tolerable than a civil officer. The latter can be harmful only in matters of this life, whereas the former can be destructive of eternal possessions. Therefore, it is a privilege of the other brethren to excommunicate such a one and substitute someone else.

Such is the firm and dependable foundation of Scripture, if we are to believe the Word of God. Over against it we see the deplorable need of Bohemia, which hitherto has been reduced almost to a beggar’s condition and forced to endure a tonsured priesthood and the most unworthy of those. In this Word we see more clearly and surely than by any light or assurance whence priests or ministers of the Word are to be sought, namely, from the flock of Christ alone, and nowhere else. We have clearly shown that to each one is given the right of ministering in the Word, and indeed that he is commanded to do so if he sees that teachers are lacking or if those in office are not teaching correctly, as Paul affirmed in 1 Cor. 14 [28ff.], so that the power of God might be proclaimed by us all. How much more, then, does not a certain community as a whole have both right and command to commit by common vote such an office to one or more, to be exercised in its stead. With the approval of the community these might then delegate the office to others.

Thus Paul writes in 2 Tim. 2[:2]: “These things entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others.” Here Paul rejects all the show of tonsure and anointing and ordaining and only requires that they be able to teach, and to them alone he wants to entrust the Word. If the office of teaching be entrusted to anyone, then everything accomplished by the Word in the church is entrusted, that is, the office of baptizing, consecrating, binding, loosing, praying, and judging doctrine. Inasmuch as the office of preaching the gospel is the greatest of all and certainly is apostolic, it becomes the foundation for all other functions, which are built upon it, such as the offices of teachers, prophets, governing [the church], speaking with tongues, the gifts of healing and helping, as Paul directs in 1 Cor. 12[:28]. Even Christ chiefly proclaimed the gospel, as the highest function of his office, and did not baptize [John 4:2]. Paul, too, gloried in the fact that he was sent not to baptize [1 Cor. 1:17], as to a secondary office, but to the primary office of preaching the gospel.

This procedure is forced upon us by necessity and is commended by the common understanding of faith. For since the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the Word it ceases to be a church. A Christian, thus, is born to the ministry of the Word in baptism, and if papal bishops are unwilling to bestow the ministry of the Word except on such as destroy the Word of God and ruin the church, then it but remains either to let the church perish without the Word or to let those

who come together cast their ballots and elect one or as many as are needed of those who are capable. By prayer and the laying on of hands let them commend and certify these to the whole assembly, and recognize and honor them as lawful bishops and ministers of the Word, believing beyond a shadow of doubt that this has been done and accomplished by God. For in this way the common agreement of the faithful, those who believe and confess the gospel, is realized and expressed.

If the aforementioned arguments are not conclusive, it ought to be sufficient to admonish and affirm what Christ said in Matt. 18[:19, 20], “If two of you agree upon earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” If then the agreement of three or two in the name of the Lord makes all things possible, and Christ endorses as his own the things they do, how much more may we not believe that it has happened or can happen with his approval and guidance when we come together in his name, pray together, and elect bishops and ministers of the Word from among ourselves. Even before such election we have been born and called into such a ministry through baptism.

If we ask for an example, there is one in Acts 18[:24ff.], where we read of Apollos who came to Ephesus without call or ordination, and taught fervently, powerfully confuting the Jews. By what right, I ask, did he exercise the ministry of the Word except by the general right common to all Christians, as described in 1 Cor. 14[:30], “If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent,” and in 1 Pet. 2[:9], “That you might declare his wonderful deeds”? This man was afterward even made an apostle without the formality of ordination, and not only functioned in the ministry of the Word but also proved himself useful in many ways to those who had already come to faith. In the same way any Christian should feel obligated to act, if he saw the need and was competent to fill it, even without a call from the community. How much more then should he do so if he is asked and called by the brethren who are his equals, or by the whole community?

Another example is provided by Stephen and Philip, who were ordained only to the service at the tables [Acts 6:5, 6]. Yet the one wrought signs and wonders among the people, disputed with members of the synagogue and refuted the council of the Jews with the word of the Spirit [Acts 6:8ff.], and the other converted Samaritans and travelled to Azotus and Caesarea [Acts 8:5ff., 40]. By what right and authority, I ask? Certainly they were not asked or called by anyone, but they did it on their own initiative and by reason of a common law, since the door was open to them, and they saw the need of a people who were ignorant and deprived of the Word. How much more readily they would have done it had they been asked or called by anyone or by the community? And the eunuch converted by Philip [Acts 8:36], whom we may reasonably believe remained a Christian, undoubtedly taught the Word of God to many, since he had the command to make known the wonderful deeds of God who called him from darkness into his marvelous light [1 Pet. 2:9]. From his word resulted the faith of many, since the Word of God does not return in vain [Isa. 55:11]. From faith sprang a church, and the church through the Word received and exercised a ministry of baptizing and teaching, and of all the other functions enumerated

above. All these things a eunuch accomplished through no other right than that inherent in baptism and faith, especially in places lacking any other ministers.

It remains only, dear sirs, that you be clothed in an unyielding faith, a faith which needs to be courageous, if you would advise your Bohemia well. We write these things to those who believe. Unbelievers will not comprehend what we say. To them it makes no difference whether they have bishops or not, since they are neither Christians nor a church of God. They are not persuaded by ever so clear Scriptures or examples, but are persuaded by superficial masks such as tonsure, anointing, and vestments, which are based on no Scripture or example, but approved only by the use of centuries and of multitudes. To such things the devout Christian pays no attention. He needs only attend to the substance which is the Word of God, and, full of faith, believe that he can do and attain all that he knows is promised therein.

They object and say, “A new thing and unprecedented, so to elect and create bishops.” I answer, it is the most ancient custom, following the example of the Apostles and their disciples, but abolished and destroyed by the contrary examples and pestilential teachings of the papists. Therefore we had much rather labor to drive out this more recent kind of plague and recover an earlier kind of health. Yet, even if it were a most recent innovation, if the Word of God here enlightens and commands us, and the need of souls compels it, then the novelty of the thing ought not at all to affect us, but the majesty of the Word. For, I ask, is it not new things that faith effects? Was not this kind of a ministry new in the days of the Apostles? Was it not a new thing when Abraham offered his son? Was it not a new thing for the children of Israel to pass through the sea? Will it not be a new thing for me to go through death to life? In all these things it is the Word of God, not the novelty, that we regard. If we should stop at the novelty of a thing, we would never be able to believe anything in the Word of God.

Believe the Word of God, therefore, my brethren, and the novelty of your own example will not affect you. For if novelty means anything why does it not mean something that you Bohemians alone have withstood the pope and dared everything in the spirit of John Huss? Was that not a novelty, not only unprecedented but contrary to what the whole earth has been used to, even to this day, and you were then not as clear as to the support of Scripture as in this case? If then, alone, you dared and attempted to assert and defend rights in danger of destruction and extinction when the peril of souls was not so present or so great, why now should you not attempt, assert and defend rights being destroyed when you are supported by so many shields and arms of the arsenal of David? [Song of Sol. 4:4]. There is the further consideration of such a pressing danger to souls and of a wretched captivity on the one hand, and of the challenge of liberty, with right and justice, on the other. If there is some difficulty in this new situation it will be eased after a period of trial. Certainly it will be much easier than what you had to endure because of your defection from papal tyranny. That is, if you dare in the Lord to do this, and the Lord will be with you.

Act in this way: first beseech God with prayers, both individually and in common. For this is a great undertaking, and the magnitude of it, rather than its novelty, impresses me. I don't want you to attempt anything by your own powers or wisdom, but to approach the matter in humility, with fear and trembling, lamenting and confessing that your own sins have brought on this

misery and captivity. Before the seat of propitiation and the throne of grace [Heb. 4:16], namely, Jesus Christ, the bishop of our souls [1 Pet. 2:25], bring your supplications and prayers that he might send his Spirit into your hearts. For he works with you, or rather, works in you both to will and to do [Phil. 2:13]. For if this thing is to be begun auspiciously and to continue successfully, it is necessary that there be in you the divine strength which, as Peter testifies, God supplies [1 Pet. 4:11].

When you have so prayed, have no doubt that he to whom you have prayed is faithful and will give what you ask, opening to him who knocks and granting to him who seeks [Matt. 7:8]. Thus you may be assured that you are not pushing this matter, but being pushed in it. Then call and come together freely, as many as have been touched in heart by God to think and judge as you do. Proceed in the name of the Lord to elect one or more whom you desire, and who appear to be worthy and able. Then let those who are leaders among you lay hands upon them, and certify and commend them to the people and the church or community. In this way let them become your bishops, ministers, or pastors. Amen. The qualifications of those to be elected are fully described by Paul, in Tit. 1[:6ff.], and 1 Tim. 3[:2ff.].

It is not necessary, I think, to put this form of election immediately into practice in the Diet of Bohemia as a whole. But if individual cities adopt it for themselves the example of one will soon be followed by another. The Diet might well consider whether this form should be adopted by all of Bohemia, or if one part might accept, and another part postpone decision or even reject it altogether. For none should be forced to believe. We must give freedom and honor to the Holy Spirit that he may move wherever he will. We cannot hope that these things will be acceptable to all, especially right away. The fact that not all agree should not affect you—rather you ought be moved to the venture when many do not agree with you. It is enough if at first a few set the example. After the use has been established and in the course of time the whole people will be challenged to follow their example. As the venture succeeds, with the help of the Lord, and many cities adopt this method of electing their bishops, then these bishops may wish to come together and elect one or more from their number to be their superiors, who would serve them and hold visitations among them, as Peter visited the churches, according to the account in the Book of Acts [Acts 8:14ff.; 9:32ff.]. Then Bohemia would return again to its rightful and evangelical archbishopric, which would be rich, not in large income and much authority, but in many ministers and visitations of the churches.

But if you are altogether too weak to dare attempt this free and apostolic way of establishing a ministry, I suppose we must endure your weakness and permit you to go on accepting those ordained by papal bishops, such as your Gallus. Use these, instead of the papal bishops, to call and elect and ordain such as they think capable and you will endure, according to the foregoing and to the teaching of Paul. For in Paul's view he is certainly a bishop who takes the lead in the preaching of the Word. Such is your Gallus though he is not resplendent in bishop's mitre and staff and other pride and pomp, which are only meant to amaze the stupid crowd. Let it be thus until you grow up and fully know what is the power of the Word of God. Clearly we cannot advise you in any other way at this time. For it is not possible for you to accept papal ordination

and those ordained by it without sin and disobedience, and therefore without the risk of the destruction of souls.

If you are troubled and anxious as to whether or not you are truly a church of God, I would say to you, that a church is not known by customs but by the Word. In 1 Cor. 14[:24, 25], Paul says that if an unbeliever comes into the church and finds those disclosing the secrets of his heart, he will fall on his face and declare that God is really present there. Of this you can be sure, that the Word of God and knowledge of Christ are richly present among you. And wherever the Word of God and knowledge of Christ are, they are not in vain, however deficient those who have the Word may be in external customs. The church indeed is weak because of its sins. But its fault is not in the Word. It sins indeed, but it does not deny or ignore the Word. We may not, therefore, reject those who accept and confess the Word, even though they do not shine in any splendid sanctity, as long as they do not persist in manifest sins. There is then no reason for you to doubt that the church of God is among you, even if there are only ten or six who have the Word. What such would do, along with others who do not yet have the Word but who would give their consent, certainly may be considered the work of Christ if they act, as we have said, in humility and in the spirit of prayer.

Finally, that which I fear will be the most formidable hindrance to this plan, namely, that in this matter as in every one that is of God, we must reckon with a cross. For Satan is neither asleep nor unaware of what we propose, and he will not be slow in his opposition. He is the prince of this world and knows our thoughts, even as we know his. But I speak of this cross because the powers of the world and the princes of the nations in their power will not permit you to attempt these plans. Indeed they will try to stop you before you really decide how to begin. Not only is Satan a prince, but a god of this age, and he so works in the heart of the unbelievers that clearly there can be no hope of achieving your plans with peace and outward tranquillity. Rather, when the tumult becomes greatest and the tempest strongest and the vessel is overwhelmed by waves, you will think that it will surely sink.

What else can I say to this than what Peter said, “We must obey God rather than man”? [Acts 5:29]. For when it has been established that the matter is holy and pleasing to God, as indeed this is, it is necessary to take one’s stand as on a rock, not regarding the towering waves and threatening winds or the onrushing waters. This only should be regarded, that peace and quiet, grace and honor belong to them who know and do the things of God. Christ in fact sends this fire on earth and arouses this terrible Behemoth, not because he is harsh, but in order to teach us that any success we have is not the result of our infirmity but of his power, lest we boast or exalt ourselves above the grace of God. We ourselves are silent in our despair, and as Scripture everywhere admonishes, we allow Him to fight for us. Despite our weakness he overcomes every force and power, and while we are silent he quiets the movement of the wide sea and its waves. So Scripture says, “In quietness and in trust shall be your strength” [Isa. 30:15], and again, “I have given him a bitter struggle in order that he may overcome” [Wisd. of Sol. 10:12].

Most of all you ought be impelled to go on when you see the resistance of powers and princes, strengthened as by a very sure argument that your enterprise is of God and that God himself, whose word you hear, will be with you. For if this counsel were of the world, the world would

not only allow, but also would love, what is its own [John 15:19]. But now since it is not of this world, but God put it in your heart through his Word, therefore the world not only will not allow it, but will even hate and persecute it. “But be of good cheer, he has overcome the world” [John 16:33]. And, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” [1 John 4:4], even if things be so overturned by tumult and dissension that, to the unbelieving, heaven itself threatens to fall. But our rock is undisturbed by thundering and lightning, and fears no darkening skies or stormy clouds.¹⁷ It does not tremble before contending winds and roaring tempests, but is sure of itself and confidently awaits clear skies.

Wherefore, “Fear not, Judah and Jerusalem, but stand still, and see the victory of the Lord on your behalf ... go out against them, and the Lord will be with you” [2 Chron. 20:17]. For it is not something new or strange if the prince of this world rages when he sees his kingdom threatened. What else can he do? He would prefer to possess his palace in peace [Luke 11:21], but when he sees that he cannot do this, he tries that which is his final weapon, namely rage and force. “Like a roaring lion he prowls around, seeking someone to devour” [1 Pet. 5:8]. Since God has forewarned us to recognize what kind of character he has, can we ever expect him to be different, and should we not the more bravely resist him, in faith? Stand fast then, good sirs, and go forth with the Word of God, armed with the invincible and all-powerful sword of the Spirit. For either you must attempt this way in brave faith, or else desist altogether. “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” [Eph. 6:12].

I have spoken thus (since it was necessary) about the method of establishing a ministry of the church, in my simplicity, satisfied if I have furnished occasion to others more able and learned and apt in speech to think and express themselves. For not all are competent in everything. “There are varieties of service but the same Lord” [1 Cor. 12:5, 6], who works not in one alone, but in all, not as we want, but as he wills.

As to the reform of the mass and the arranging of the worship of God as well as to other functions of the ecclesiastical ministry either others may speak or I myself may say something some other time. A person who is commissioned as a minister of the gospel ought, however, to be able to conduct himself successfully in these matters, if he follows the teaching of Him by whom he was anointed. Now it is enough if by prayer and devotion we obtain from God such a ministry and if we are worthy, when we obtain it, to keep it and to rejoice in it.¹

¹ Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 40, pp. xiv–44). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.