

The Unaltered Augsburg Confession

A.D. 1530

Translation and historical notes

by

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• Historical Introduction •

Martin Luther's study of the Bible in the years leading up to 1517 caused him to see God's grace clearly for the first time. He gradually came to see that sinners are saved by the grace of God, as a result of Jesus Christ's perfect life and perfect death on the cross.

When Luther learned this, he came to see more clearly the false teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. False teaching about repentance and forgiveness of sins led Luther to write his Ninety-five Theses. As time went on, he spoke out more and more boldly for reforms. Early in 1521 he was excommunicated from the church. That same year he lost his citizenship in the Holy Roman Empire because of his defense of biblical teaching.

However, Luther's teachings continued to spread throughout Europe. Many attempts were made to reunite the church. The emperor was worried because the Turkish army (made up of Muslims) was attacking Austria and threatening to overrun Europe. The emperor thought that his army could defeat the Turks only if the church was first reunited.

In 1530 Emperor Charles V tried one last time to reunite the followers of Luther with the Roman Catholic Church. He commanded the Lutherans to appear at a *diet* (or council) in the southern German town of Augsburg. Since Luther was still considered an outlaw, he was not able to go. Philip Melancthon took Luther's place as the chief Lutheran theologian.

An official from Saxony wrote the preface. Melancthon wrote the rest of the Augsburg Confession, basing it on other writings of Luther and his followers (the Schwabach Articles, Torgau Articles, and other writings). The first 21 articles (or chapters) explained the faith and doctrine of the Lutherans. These were followed by seven more articles explaining some of the false practices that the Lutherans had corrected.

After much discussion, seven Lutheran princes and representatives of two German cities decided that the Augsburg Confession was an accurate explanation of their faith and practice. The princes and representatives then signed the document to show their approval of it. They were

John, the duke of Electoral Saxony (the territory where Luther lived and worked)

George, a prince of Brandenburg (a territory in northeastern Germany)

Ernest and Francis, both dukes of Lueneberg (a territory in northern Germany)

Philip, ruler of Hesse (a territory in north central Germany)

John Frederick, the duke of Ducal Saxony (a territory east of Luther's part of Saxony)

Wolfgang, prince of Anhalt (a territory north of Saxony)

Representatives of the town council and leaders of Nuremberg (an independent city in southeastern Germany)

Representatives of the town council of Reutlingen (an independent city in southwestern Germany)

The Augsburg Confession was written in both German and Latin (our translation follows the Latin more closely than the German). The German copy was read to the council at Augsburg on June 25, 1530. The Catholics condemned the confession, and they wrote a long response to it. Melancthon then wrote a much longer Apology (meaning "defense") of the Augsburg Confession. This was given to the emperor in September of 1530 and later expanded further by Melancthon.

Years later, Melancthon made significant changes that weakened the truth of the Augsburg Confession, especially in its teaching on the Lord's Supper. After Luther's death these changes caused confusion and conflict among his followers. In 1580 the original Unaltered (unchanged) Augsburg Confession (the version of 1530) and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession were included as part of the *Book of Concord*, the official book of confessions of the Lutheran church.

The translation presented here is based on that of F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, published in 1921 in the *Concordia Triglotta*. Our version attempts to update the English and simplify it for general congregational use. Marginal notes have been added to explain the technical terms, proper names, and historical references. The sentence numbering of the *Triglotta* has been retained for easy reference.

Today when Lutheran pastors and teachers enter the ministry, they still swear to uphold the teachings of the Bible as explained in the *Book of Concord*, including the Augsburg Confession.

The Augsburg Confession of 1530

Study edition

Preface to Emperor Charles V

1] All Powerful Emperor, Caesar Augustus, Most Merciful Lord: Your Royal Majesty has called a **council** of the empire here at Augsburg to discuss what to do against the **Turks**, that most fearful and longtime enemy of our Christian name and religion. You wish us to agree on a strong and lasting military action that can successfully defeat their furious attacks. **2]** You also called this meeting to consider the disagreements about our holy religion and Christian faith. In these religious matters you wished the opinions and judgments of the different sides to be heard in each other's presence. **3]** You wanted us to consider and discuss these matters among ourselves with both sides showing love and kindness. Then, you wished us to settle these matters by removing and correcting those things that were described and understood in different ways in the writings of both sides. Only then will Christians again find agreement on a single simple truth. **4]** Christians could then also be able to accept and hold onto one pure and true religion in the future. Since we are all under one Christ and fight under him, we should also be able to live in unity and agreement in the one Christian church.

5] We, the undersigned **electors**, princes, and other leaders who joined with us, have been called to this council just like the other electors, princes, and authorities. We have obeyed your royal command and promptly come to **Augsburg**. Although we don't want to boast, we were among the first to arrive.

6] Among other things, which at the very beginning of the council Your Royal Majesty proposed to the electors, princes, and other authorities of the empire here at Augsburg, was this: That the various authorities of the empire, in response to your royal decree, should write down and submit their opinions and decisions in both the **German and Latin** languages. **7]** So on the first Wednesday, after careful consideration, we told Your Royal Majesty that we would submit the statements of our side's confession on the following Wednesday. Now, in order to obey Your Royal Majesty's wishes in these religious matters, **8]** we here present the confession of our preachers and of ourselves. This shows what kind of doctrine from the Holy Scriptures and the

Charles V—King of Spain; became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1519.

council—A meeting of princes from around Germany; called a *diet*.

Turks—Powerful members of the Ottoman Empire were trying to invade Europe at this time. Having already overrun Hungary, they were now threatening Austria. They were seen as an especially dangerous threat since they were Muslims who worshiped Allah rather than the triune God.

electors—Two of the German princes were among the seven men who elected the emperor.

Augsburg—The city in southern Germany where this meeting was held.

German and Latin—Latin was the official language of the empire; but since this was a meeting of German princes, the writings were made available in both languages.

pure Word of God has been preached up to this time in our lands, territories, and cities, and what is taught in our churches.

9] The other electors, princes, and authorities of the empire may wish, according to the royal decree mentioned above, to present similar writings in Latin and German, giving their opinions about these religious matters. **10]** If so, then we, with the princes and friends listed above, are prepared for a friendly meeting with them here before Your Royal Majesty, our most merciful lord. We can then discuss all the possible ways and means through which we might be united, as far as this may be done with honor. After this matter has been peacefully discussed between us on both sides without giving offense, may it be brought to an end with God's help, and may we all agree again to one true religion. **11]** For just as we are all under one Christ and fight under his command, we ought to confess the one Christ, in agreement with Your Royal Majesty's decree. Everything ought to be handled in agreement with the truth of God. With earnest prayers, we ask God to do this.

12] Now we turn to the other electors, princes, and authorities on the opposing side. Your Royal Majesty has ordered each side to present its case in writing and then to calmly discuss it with each other. But if this produces no progress, or if we reach no solution after handling the matter this way, **13]** at least we will show you clearly that we are making every effort to bring about Christian harmony. And we will do so as far as God and a good conscience allow us. **14]** Your royal majesty and the other electors and authorities of the empire, and everyone who has a sincere love and zeal for religion and who will listen honestly to this matter, will graciously notice and understand our good faith efforts from this **confession** of ours and our associates.

confession—Since this document was a confession of faith and teaching, it became known as the Augsburg Confession.

Council of Speyer—The council at the city of Speyer in 1526 had decided that each prince could decide whether his territory would be Catholic or Lutheran. A second meeting there in 1529 overturned that decision and again made the Catholic faith the only legal religion.

general council—A council of church leaders from all parts of the church.

15-16] Your Royal Majesty, not just once but often you graciously informed the electors, princes, and authorities of the empire that in dealing with this religious matter, you were not willing to and would not decide anything on your own. You had this proclaimed publicly in your royal decrees, as well as at the **Council of Speyer** in A.D. 1526. Instead, you used your office to encourage the Roman pope to call a **general council**. **17]** The same thing was announced publicly in greater detail a year ago at the last council at Speyer. **18]** There Your Royal Majesty, through his highness Ferdinand, King of Bohemia and Hungary, our friend and merciful lord, as well as through the official speaker and royal commissioners, had presented the following points, among others: that Your Royal Majesty had read and considered the decision of Your Majesty's representative in the empire, and of the president and royal counselors, and the representatives from other authorities gathered at

Regensburg as to the calling of a general council; **19]** that Your Royal Majesty also thought it proper to call a council; and that Your Royal Majesty thought the Roman pope could be persuaded to hold a general council, **20]** because the other matters that needed settling between Your Royal Majesty and the Roman pope were nearing agreement and Christian reconciliation. Therefore, Your Royal Majesty promised that you would yourself try to obtain the pope's consent for calling a general council and that Your Royal Majesty would send out letters to announce it as soon as possible.

21] So, if the differences between us and the other parties in this religious matter cannot be settled peacefully and in love, then here, before Your Royal Majesty, we agree to the following. In addition to what we have already done, we will all come and defend our position before such a general, free, Christian council. For at all the royal councils held during Your Majesty's reign, the electors, princes, and other authorities of the empire have voted in favor of calling a general council. **22]** Already previously we have in a lawful manner taken a stand and urged that a general council be called in Your Royal Majesty's presence to settle this most important and serious matter. **23]** We remain firm in seeking support from Your Royal Majesty and in seeking a general council. We do not intend nor would it be possible for us to give up our position by this or any other document, unless the matter between us and the other side is settled in a friendly way, the tensions are lessened, and Christian peace is restored, as called for in your latest royal decree. **24]** We hereby solemnly and publicly testify to this.

Regensburg—A city in southern Germany where a royal council was held in 1527.

• Chief Articles of Faith •

Article 1: About God

Council of Nicaea—The first general council of the church, held in A.D. 325 in the city of Nicaea (in present-day Turkey). More than three hundred bishops discussed various issues, especially condemning the teachings of an Egyptian named Arius, who taught that Jesus was a lesser God than the Father. Our Nicene Creed is named after that meeting. In its present form, it dates to 381.

Manicheans—Followers of a religion of Persian origin that said there were two competing gods, one good and one evil.

Valentinians—Early heretics who combined Christian ideas about God and creation with secret mystical ideas referred to as Gnosticism.

Arians—Followers of Arius (see Council of Nicaea above).

Eunomians—Fourth century heretics who believed Jesus and God were almost totally unlike each other.

Muslims—Followers of Mohammed are also included here since they deny the Trinity.

Paul of Samosata—Another early heretic. He denied that Jesus was eternal.

Pelagius—A heretic who lived about A.D. 400. He denied that Adam's sin was passed down to his descendants. Therefore, a person could become sinless if he tried hard enough.

1] Our churches are united in teaching what the **Council of Nicaea** decreed: it is true that there is only one divine being, but there are three persons; and that this should be believed without a doubt. **2]** In other words, there is one divine being, which is called God and which truly is God. He is eternal, has no body, has no parts, has all power, wisdom, and goodness. He is the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. **3]** Yet there are also three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are of the same being and power and are equally eternal. We use the word *person* in the same way the early Christians used it. **4]** It does not mean a part or quality of another being but something that exists in and of itself.

5] Our churches condemn all heresies that have sprung up against this teaching, such as the **Manicheans**, who taught there were two divine beings, one good and the other evil. We also condemn the **Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Muslims**, and all others like them. **6]** We also condemn the ancient and modern followers of **Paul of Samosata**. They claim that there is only one divine person. Through clever and ungodly reasoning, they argue that the Word [Christ] and the Holy Spirit are not distinct persons, but that “Word” means only a spoken word, and that “Spirit” refers to a movement within created beings.

Article 2: About Original Sin

1] Our churches also teach that since Adam's fall into sin, all men who are fathered in the normal physical way are conceived and born with sin. This means that they are born without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with evil desires. **2]** This disease, or original sin, truly is sin. It condemns and brings eternal death to those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

3] Our churches condemn the followers of **Pelagius** and all others who deny that original sin is truly sin. Such people argue that humans can be justified before God by their own strength and reason. This lessens the glory of Christ's work and its benefits.

Article 3: About the Son of God

1] Our churches also teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took upon himself human nature in the womb of the blessed vir-

gin Mary. **2]** Therefore, he has two natures, one divine and the other human. They are united in one person and cannot be separated. Thus there is only one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the virgin Mary. He truly suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried. **3]** He went through all this so that he could restore us to peace with the Father and be a sacrifice, not just for original sin, but also for all other sins.

4] The Word [Christ] also went down into hell, and truly rose again the third day. Afterward he went up into heaven so that he might sit on the right hand of the Father. There he rules forever and has power over all creatures, making holy all those that believe in him. **5]** He does this by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts to rule, comfort, and make them alive, as well as defending them against the devil and the power of sin.

6] This same Christ will openly come again to judge the living and the dead, etc., as the Apostles' Creed says.

Article 4: About Justification

1] Our churches also teach that humans cannot be **justified** before God by their own power, **merits**, or deeds. Rather, they are freely justified **for Christ's sake** through faith. **2]** By *faith* we mean this: that they believe that they are both received into God's favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. For by his death, Christ has paid the debt for our sins. **3]** Thus God views the person who has this faith to be righteous in his sight (Romans 3 and 4).

justified—Declared not guilty.

merits—Things that are worthy of praise or a reward.

for Christ's sake—Because of what Christ did.

Article 5: About the Ministry

1] So that we might receive this faith, God established the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. For the Holy Spirit is given to people through the Word and sacraments, the tools through which God works. **2]** Whenever and wherever it pleases God, this ministry creates faith in the hearts of those who hear the gospel. **3]** And the gospel message is this: that not because of our own merits, but for Christ's sake, God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace because of what Christ did.

4] We condemn the **Anabaptists** and all others who believe that the Holy Spirit can come to people without the external Word, through their own preparations, thoughts, and actions.

Anabaptists—A group whose name means "to be baptized again." The Anabaptists started as followers of Luther but came to believe that the Holy Spirit did not work through infant baptism, so adults needed to be baptized again. They also taught that the Holy Spirit would come to man directly, without use of Word or sacrament.

Article 6: About New Obedience

1] We teach that this faith must bring forth good fruits and that one must do the good works commanded by God, in accord with

Ambrose—A famous bishop of the Italian city of Milan from 374 to 397. He was considered one of the four most important teachers of the western church.

God’s will. However, one must never rely on such works to earn justification in God’s eyes. **2]** For we receive forgiveness of sins and justification only by faith. Christ himself says, “When you have done everything . . . say, ‘We are unworthy servants’” (Luke 17:10). The church fathers teach this same thing. **3]** **Ambrose** says, “God has established that whoever believes in Christ freely receives the forgiveness of sins. He is saved without works, by faith alone.”

Article 7: About the Church

1] Our churches also teach that there is and always will be one holy church. The church is the gathering of all believers, in which the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are properly administered.

2] For true unity in the church, it is enough to agree about the teaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments. **3]** It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rituals or church ceremonies that have been set up by humans, should be the same everywhere. **4]** As Paul says, “One body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Article 8: What the Church Is

1] The church actually is the gathering of all saints and true believers. But in this life many hypocrites and evil people are mixed in with the believers. Because of this, we may at times need to receive the sacraments from evil men. As Christ says, “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat” (Matthew 23:2). **2]** Both the Word and the sacraments are able to produce their results because Christ instituted them and commanded us to use them. This is true even when they are given and administered by evil men.

3] We condemn the **Donatists**, and those like them, who say it is wrong to use the ministry of evil men in the church, and who think the ministry of evil men is wrong and has no power.

Article 9: About Baptism

1] About Baptism our churches teach that it is necessary for salvation, **2]** and that through Baptism God offers us his grace. Also, children ought to be baptized. Those brought to God through Baptism are received into God’s grace.

3] We condemn the **Anabaptists**, who reject the baptizing of children and say that children are saved without Baptism.

Donatists—During the early persecution of Christians, many weak Christians denied their faith. After the persecution ended, some repented and asked to be allowed to enter the church again. The Donatists said that this should not be allowed. When it was allowed, they left and formed their own churches. They were especially numerous in North Africa (present-day Algeria and Tunisia). They further taught that if a pastor was found to have committed a bad sin, the baptisms and other acts he had performed would not have godly power.

Anabaptists—See note in Article 5.

Article 10: About the Lord's Supper

1] About the Lord's Supper our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present under the forms of the bread and wine and are given to those who eat the Lord's Supper. 2] We reject those that teach anything else.

Article 11: About Confession

1] About confession our churches teach that **private absolution** should be kept in the churches and not stopped. When confessing sins, however, it is not necessary to confess all sins individually. 2] For that is impossible. As the psalm says, "Who can discern his errors?" (Psalm 19:12).

private absolution—The practice of confessing sins to a pastor in private and receiving the personal assurance of forgiveness from him.

Article 12: About Repentance

1] This is what our churches teach about repentance. For those who have fallen from faith after Baptism there is forgiveness of sins whenever they repent. 2] The church should also announce forgiveness to such people who are returning in repentance. Now, repentance consists properly of these two parts: 3] First, there is contrition. Contrition is the terror that fills the conscience because of the knowledge of sin. 4] The second part of contrition is faith. This faith is given birth by the gospel, or by absolution, 5] and it believes that for Christ's sake sins are forgiven. 6] It also brings comfort to the conscience, and delivers it from its terror. Finally, good works must follow, for these are the fruits of repentance. Like John the Baptist says, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

7] We condemn the **Anabaptists** who say that those who have once been justified cannot lose the Holy Spirit. We also condemn those who argue that some people can become so perfect in this life 8] that they no longer sin.

Anabaptists—See note in Article 5.

9] The **Novatians** also are condemned, for they will not give absolution to people who have fallen from faith after Baptism, even though they have repented.

Novatians—Like the Donatists (see the note in Article 8), this early group refused to allow Christians who had denied their faith to re-enter the church, even if they repented. They were especially strong in Rome in the third century.

10] We also reject those who do not teach that forgiveness of sins comes through faith but who urge us to earn God's grace by making payments of our own.

Article 13: About the Use of the Sacraments

1] This is what our churches teach about the use of the sacraments. The sacraments were not only set up to be marks of confession to identify Christians but especially to be signs and promises of God's will towards us, 2] and were set up to awaken and confirm the faith of those who use them. Therefore we must

just by taking part in them—The belief that faith was not needed, but that just going through the act of being baptized or receiving the Lord Supper was enough to receive their blessings. This is called *sacramentalism*.

use the sacraments so that faith, which believes the promises that are offered and seen in the sacraments, can grow.

3] We therefore condemn those who teach that the sacraments bring justification **just by taking part in them**, as well as those who do not teach that a faith which believes in the forgiveness of sins is needed for the proper use of the sacraments.

Article 14: About Church Order

This is what our churches teach about church order. No one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless he has been called in a proper and normal way.

Article 15: About Church Customs

1] This is what our churches teach about church customs. Church customs that were set up by humans may be practiced only if they can be used without sinning. Customs should be followed if they are useful for peace and good order in the church, such as celebrating particular holy days, festivals, and the like.

2] But people must be strongly reminded that such customs must not harm the consciences of others, as when it is taught that such customs must be followed in order to receive salvation.

3] We also strongly state that man-made traditions that were started in order to win God's favor, to earn God's grace, or to pay for sins are in conflict with the gospel and the doctrine of faith. Therefore the vows taken by monks and traditions about not eating meat on certain days and celebrating certain festival days cannot be used properly. **4]** They are contrary to the gospel since they have been established to earn God's grace and to pay for sins.

Article 16: About Civil Affairs

1] This is what our churches teach about the police and civil affairs. Properly established government laws and authorities of the land are good works from God. **2]** Also, it is proper for Christians to hold government office, to serve as judges, to judge matters on the basis of royal and other existing laws, to hand down just punishments to those who do evil, to fight in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to own property, to make an oath when required by government officials, to marry a wife, or to be a bride.

Anabaptists—See note in Article 5.

3] We condemn the **Anabaptists** who forbid Christians to hold public office.

4] We condemn also those who do not seek Christian holiness by fearing God and in faith but by avoiding their responsibilities as citizens. 5] For the gospel does not teach an outward and temporary righteousness but an eternal righteousness of the heart. Nor does it destroy the state or the family but very much insists that God has commanded them, and so they must be preserved. It tells us to show our love by respecting these institutions that God has established. 6] Therefore, Christians must obey their own government officials and laws, 7] except when such command them to sin. Then they must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Article 17: About Christ's Return to Judgment

1] Our churches also teach that at the end of the world, Christ will appear as a judge. 2] He will raise up all the dead. He will give eternal life and everlasting joy to the godly and elect. 3] But he will condemn the ungodly and the devils to punishment without end.

4] We condemn the **Anabaptists** who think that the punishment of demons and those people whom God condemns will not last forever.

5] We also condemn all others who are now spreading the Jewish idea that before the dead are raised, the godly will rule this world and that everywhere the ungodly will be overcome.

Article 18: About Free Will

1] This is what our churches teach about free will. Human will does have some freedom to choose to act justly in society and to make choices in matters grasped by human reason. 2] But it has no power, without the Holy Spirit, to produce righteousness in God's eyes, that is, spiritual righteousness. For following human nature a person cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). 3] But this righteousness is produced in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word. 4] This is what **Augustine** says in Book 3 of his *Admonition against the Pelagians*:

We agree that all people have a free will, free in that it can make decisions with its human reason. But it can not, without God, either begin or complete any godly things. It can only do so in the deeds of this life, whether good or evil. 5] I call those works good which arise from the good in nature, such as deciding to work in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to wear clothes, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle, to learn various useful skills, or any other good deeds having to do with this life. 6] For all of these things are

Anabaptists—See note in Article 5.

Augustine—Bishop of Hippo in North Africa (Algeria) from A.D. 395 to 430, another of the four great teachers of the western church. He spent much time writing against the teaching of Pelagius and his followers who said that man had a free will and therefore could do good by his own power if he wished.

Admonition against the Pelagians—Thought in Luther's day to be a work of Augustine. Today scholars feel it was not. In any case, the ideas it expresses are in agreement with those taught by Augustine.

dependent on the loving care of God. Yes, by him and through him they have come into being and continue to exist.

7] I call those works evil such as the decision to worship an idol, to commit murder, etc.

Pelagians—Followers of Pelagius (see previous note).

substance of the act—It is enough to obey the law outwardly in its main points (that is, not to murder anyone, not to take another man's wife, etc.).

8] We condemn the **Pelagians** and all others who teach that without the Holy Spirit, by the power of human nature alone, we are able to love God above all things. Or that by our own power we can do the commandments of God according to the **substance of the act.** 9] For, although human nature is able in one sense to do the outward act (that is, it can keep the hand from stealing and murdering), yet it cannot produce the inner realities, such as the proper fear of God, trust in the works of God, holiness, patience, etc.

Article 19: About the Cause of Sin

This is what our churches teach about the cause of sin. Although God does create and preserve the natural world, yet the cause of sin is the will of the wicked, that is, of the devil and ungodly men. Not having God's help, this evil will turns itself away from God, as Christ says, "When he lies, he speaks his native language" (John 8:44).

Article 20: About Good Works

1] Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding people to do good works. 2] But our teachers have written about the Ten Commandments and written other similar books which show that they have given the people useful teaching about the various roles and positions in life. They have pointed out the deeds that are God pleasing in the various roles and positions. 3] In earlier times preachers taught little about such things. They only urged people to do childish and useless deeds, such as celebrating particular holy days or certain **fasts**, taking part in **lay societies**, going on **pilgrimages**, having services in honor of saints, using **rosaries**, becoming **monks**, and the like. 4] Since our opponents have been warned about these things, they are now unlearning them and are no longer preaching about these useless deeds as before. 5] In addition, they begin to talk about faith, something they were amazingly silent about before! 6] They teach that we are justified not by works alone, yet they join faith and works together, and say that we are justified by faith and works. 7] This teaching is better than the one they taught before and can give more comfort than what they used to teach.

8] The teaching about faith, which should be the most important teaching in the Church, has remained unknown for a very long time. For everyone must agree that there was the deepest silence in sermons about the righteousness of faith. Only the teaching

fasts—The Catholic Church taught that people could earn favor with God if they did not eat meat on Friday or went without food for certain periods of time.

lay societies—Religious clubs organized to do good works and worship together.

pilgrimages—People also sought to earn God's favor and blessings by visiting the graves of saints and other special places.

rosaries—Repeating over and over a special prayer called the *rosary*.

monks—Men and women who took oaths to live in poverty, not to marry, and to serve the church by living in communities apart from the rest of society.

about good works was taught in the churches. Therefore we teach in our churches the following things about faith:

9] First of all, that our deeds cannot reconcile us to God or earn forgiveness of sins, grace, and justification. We can only receive these by faith when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake. He alone has been proclaimed as **mediator** and **propitiation** (1 Timothy 2:5), so that we can be reconciled to the Father only through him. **10]** Whoever, therefore, believes that he deserves grace because of his deeds, despises the merit and grace of Christ and is seeking a way to God without Christ by human strength, even though Christ has said about himself, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

11] This teaching about faith is discussed in many places by Paul, such as, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works" (Ephesians 2:8).

12] And so that no one will say that we have invented a new interpretation of Paul, we can show that this entire matter is supported by the witness of the church fathers. **13]** For in many of his books, **Augustine** defends grace and the righteousness of faith against putting faith in the value of good works. **14]** And **Ambrose**, in his book *On the Calling of the Gentiles* and in other places, teaches the same thing. For in *On the Calling of the Gentiles*, he says this: "If justification, which is brought about through grace, were the result of the good deeds which you have done, it would not then be the free gift of a giver, but the reward owed to the laborer." In that case redemption by the blood of Christ would be of little value, nor would the mercy of God replace the importance of man's good works.

15] But, although this doctrine is despised by those who have not experienced it, nevertheless godly and anxious consciences find by experience that it brings the greatest comfort. For consciences cannot find rest by doing good deeds, but only by faith when they stand on the firm ground that they have been reconciled to God because of what Christ has done. **16]** As Paul teaches, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). **17]** This whole doctrine must be understood as part of the struggle of the terrified conscience, nor can it be understood apart from that fight. **18]** Therefore inexperienced and worldly people make bad judgments about this matter. They imagine that Christian righteousness is just **public and philosophical righteousness**.

19] Until now, consciences have been so bothered by this teaching about good works that they could not hear the comfort from

mediator—A person who seeks to settle a dispute between two other parties (in this case God and man).

propitiation—Something done to gain the favor of and settle a debt with another person.

Augustine—See note in Article 18.

Ambrose—See note in Article 6.

On the Calling of the Gentiles—This work, thought to be by Ambrose in Luther's day, is now considered a work of Prosper of Aquitaine, a Christian writer of the first half of the fifth century.

public and philosophical righteousness—Good deeds done in one's daily public life as the philosophers urged.

the gospel. **20]** Some persons were driven by their consciences into the desert or into monasteries, hoping to earn God's grace by living as monks. **21]** Some thought up other deeds by which they wished to earn grace and satisfy the punishment for sins. **22]** So there was a very great need to explain and bring to light again this teaching of faith in Christ, so that anxious consciences should be comforted and so that people will know that grace and forgiveness of sins and justification are received by faith in Christ.

23] People must also learn that in this context the term *faith* does not merely mean believing that certain things happened in history (the kind of faith that even the ungodly and the devil have); rather, it means a faith that believes not only the history but also the result of that history—namely, the teaching that our sins are forgiven, that is, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ.

24] Now the person who knows that he has a Father who is gracious to him through Christ truly knows God; he knows also that God cares for him, and he calls upon God. In short, he is not without God, as the heathen are. **25]** For devils and the ungodly are not able to believe this doctrine: the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, they hate God like an enemy, do not pray to him, and they expect no good from him. **26]** **Augustine** also instructs his readers about the word *faith*. He teaches that the term *faith* is used in the Scriptures not for knowledge (such as the ungodly have) but for confidence that comforts and encourages the terrified mind.

Augustine—See note in Article 18.

27] Furthermore, we teach that it is necessary to do good works, not so that we can trust them to earn grace but because it is the will of God. **28]** The forgiveness of sins and grace are received only by faith. **29]** And because the Holy Spirit is received by faith, hearts are renewed and given a new love, so that they can produce good works. **30]** For **Ambrose** says, "Faith is the mother of a good will and of acting rightly." **31]** For without the Holy Spirit, human powers are full of ungodly feelings, and they are too weak to do deeds that are good in God's sight. **32]** Besides, they are controlled by the devil, who moves humans to sin in a variety of ways, **33]** to hold ungodly opinions, and to carry out crimes openly. We can see this in the lives of the philosophers. They tried to live good lives but did not succeed. **34]** Their many sins could be seen, showing that they remained unclean. Such is the weakness of man when he is without faith and without the Holy Spirit and uses only his own strength to guide his life.

Ambrose—See note in Article 6. This again is a quote from the work by Prosper of Aquitaine (see note in paragraph 14).

35] So it is easy to see that this teaching cannot be accused of prohibiting good works. Rather, this teaching ought to be praised, because it shows how we are enabled to do truly good works.

36] For without faith there is no way that human nature can do the good works demanded in the First or Second Commandment. **37]** Without faith human nature does not call upon God, nor expect anything from God, nor bear the cross. Instead, it seeks and trusts in help from other humans. **38]** And when there is no faith and trust in God, all kinds of evil desires and human ideas rule in people’s hearts. **39]** As Christ said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). **40]** **As the church sings:**

*Without your divine favor,
There is nothing found in man,
Nothing in him is harmless.*

Article 21: About Honoring the Saints

1] About the worship of saints, we teach this: That it is permitted to remind Christians about the lives of the saints so that we may follow their faith and good deeds in our own callings in life. For example, the emperor and David are both kings. Therefore the emperor should follow the example of David in fighting to drive the **Turks** from his territory. **2]** But Scripture does not teach us to pray to the saints or to ask their help. Instead, it teaches that the one Christ is our **mediator, propitiation, high priest, and intercessor.** **3]** We are to pray to him, and he has promised that he will hear our prayers. And this is the kind of worship of which he approves above all else, namely, that we call upon him in all our troubles. **4]** “If anybody does sin, we have one person who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ” (1 John 2:1).

5] This is a summary of our teaching, in which, as you can see, there is nothing that differs from the Scriptures, from the **catholic church**, or from the **Church of Rome** as known from its early writers. Since this is the case, those people are judging us unfairly by insisting that our teachers must be considered heretics. **6]** There is, however, disagreement on certain abuses that have entered into the church without proper authority. And even in these areas, if there were some differences, the bishops should properly show us compassion because of the confession that we have here presented. For even church law is not so severe that it demands the churches to follow the same practices everywhere. And there has never been a time when all churches have had exactly the same practices. **7]** Yet, for the most part, we still follow those ancient customs very carefully. **8]** For it is false and hateful to accuse our churches of having eliminated all the ceremonies and all the things handed down from early times. **9]** But many people have complained that there were some bad things connected with our normal customs. We have tried as much as possible to correct those customs of which we could not approve with a good conscience.

As the church sings:—Part of a hymn from the Middle Ages entitled “Come Holy Spirit.”

Turks—A Turkish army of the powerful Ottoman Empire was attacking Vienna (Austria) at this time, just a few hundred miles from Augsburg. The Lutherans here say that the emperor would do right to defeat the Turks, thus following King David’s example of helping to defeat the Philistines.

mediator, propitiation—See notes in Article 20, paragraph 9.

intercessor—A person who pleads for another person.

catholic church/Church of Rome—Lutherans say their doctrine agrees with the teachings of the church everywhere (here called the *catholic*, or *universal*, church) and with the Roman (Catholic) Church in its early days as well. Since that time, however, the Roman Church has left the true teachings of the Bible.

• Discussion of the Areas in Which We Have Corrected Abuses •

articles of faith—Teachings of the Bible that a person must believe in order to be a Christian.

1] We have shown, then, that our churches do not disagree with the church about any **articles of faith**. We have only eliminated of some abuses that are new to the church, that have been wrongly accepted because of the sinfulness of the times, and that go against what church councils had intended. Therefore, we pray that Your Royal Majesty would graciously listen both to what has been changed and to the reasons why the people should not be forced to practice those abuses against their conscience. 2] Your Royal Majesty should not believe those men who spread lies among the people to make them hate our teachings. 3] First of all, they created this controversy by troubling the minds of good Christians. Now, they are trying to use the same methods to increase the disagreements. 4] For Your Royal Majesty will undoubtedly discover that our teaching and ceremonies are not as terrible as these ungodly and lying men say they are. 5] Besides, common rumors or the hateful accusations of enemies cannot uncover the truth. 6] But it is easy to see that nothing would better maintain the dignity of ceremonies and encourage reverence and godly devotion among the people than if the ceremonies were carried out properly in the churches.

Both Parts—Traditionally called *both kinds*, referring to both the bread and the wine, both the body and the blood of Christ in the Sacrament.

Article 22: About Both Parts of the Sacrament

1] We give laypeople both parts of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, because this is the commandment of the Lord: "Drink from it, all of you" (Matthew 26:27). 2] Here Christ clearly commanded that everyone should drink from the cup. 3] And so that nobody could cause trouble by saying that this refers only to priests, in 1 Corinthians 11:27 Paul gives an example from which it is seen that the entire congregation received both the bread and the wine. 4] This is what was long practiced in the church. We do not know when or by whose authority it was changed. However, **Cardinal Cusanus** tells us the time when it was approved. 5] **Cyprian** in some places makes it clear that the blood was given to the people. 6] **Jerome** says the same thing: "The priests administer the Lord's Supper, and distribute the blood of Christ to the people." 7] Indeed, **Pope Gelasius** commands that the Sacrament should not be divided (distinction 2, *On the Consecration*, chapter: "We Discover"). 8] Only more recent customs do something else. 9] But it is clear that any custom introduced against the commandments of God must not be allowed, as the church laws bear witness (distinction 8, *On Truth* and the fol-

Cardinal Cusanus—A famous German theologian and bishop, better known as Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464).

Cyprian—A famous bishop and theologian who lived about A.D. 250; he was bishop of Carthage in present-day Tunisia.

Jerome—(340–420) A famous monk and Bible scholar who lived many years in Bethlehem.

Pope Gelasius—The bishop of Rome from 492 to 496. Gelasius insisted on the people receiving both parts of the Lord's Supper. This quote, however, is from the twelfth-century canon law collection of Gratian and is not a quote of Gelasius.

lowing chapters). **10]** But the custom of not giving people both the bread and the wine came into being contrary not only to Scripture but also to early church laws and the example of what was done in the church. **11]** Therefore, if any people wished to receive both parts of the Sacrament, they should not have been forced to do something else and so cause offense to their consciences. **12]** And because withholding part of the Sacrament does not agree with Christ's command, we have also done away with **the custom of carrying the Sacrament in a procession** as well.

Article 23: About the Marriage of Priests

1] There have been widespread complaints about priests who set bad examples by living immoral lives. **2]** For that reason also, **Pope Pius** is reported to have said that there were some reasons why marriage was taken away from priests, but that there were many more important reasons why they should marry (Platina, *Life of Pius 2*). **3]** Since, therefore, our priests wished to avoid such public scandals, they married wives and taught that it was lawful for them to make marriage contracts. First of all, because **4]** Paul says, "Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife" and "it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:2,9). **5]** Second, Christ says, "Not everyone can accept this word" (Matthew 19:11), where he teaches that not everyone is fit to lead a single life; for God created man to reproduce (Genesis 1:28). **6]** And a person does not have the power to change the way he is created (unless he has an unusual gift and ability from God). For it is clear, and many people have said so, that no good, honest, moral life, no Christian, sincere, godly conduct has resulted from remaining single, but many people have felt a horrible, fearful unrest and a tortured conscience right to the end. **7]** Therefore, those who are not suited to lead a single life ought to be properly married. **8]** For no human law, no vow, can do away with the commandment and decree of God. **9]** For these reasons our pastors teach that it is lawful for them to marry wives.

10] It is also clear that in the ancient church priests were married men. **11]** For Paul says that a bishop should be chosen who is the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2). **12]** And in Germany, priests were for the first time physically forced to remain unmarried only four hundred years ago. Indeed, they offered so much resistance that when the **archbishop of Mainz** tried to publish the pope's decree on this subject, he was almost killed in the uproar raised by the angry priests. **13]** This matter was put into effect in a very harsh way. Not only were priests forbidden to marry in the future, but priests who were already married were forced to separate from their wives. This is contrary to all human

the custom of carrying the Sacrament in a procession—At the thirteenth-century church festival of Corpus Christi, held on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, the church began the practice of carrying the bread and wine through the streets in a parade.

Pope Pius—Pius II, pope from 1458 to 1464. The writer Bartholomeo Platina recorded this in *Lives of the Popes*.

archbishop of Mainz—This happened in 1075 to Siegfried, then archbishop of Mainz.

most famous councils—Probably referring to the Council of Nicaea (325), which rejected a proposal that all clergy remain unmarried.

celibacy—The state of remaining unmarried; beginning in the fifth century, the Catholic Church gradually introduced the rule that priests could not marry.

church laws—Probably a reference to Gratian's *Decretum*, 1.dist.34, chapter 7.

Cyprian—See note in Article 22, paragraph 5.

mass—The normal Catholic service that included the Lord's Supper.

and divine laws, contrary even to the church laws made by the popes and by the **most famous councils**. Besides, many God-fearing and intelligent people in high positions frequently expressed their doubts that any good results have come from enforcing **celibacy**. It deprives men of marriage, which God himself created and allowed as a choice to men. Rather, celibacy has brought about many great and evil vices and much sin.

14] As the world grows older and mankind's nature is gradually growing weaker, we must be on guard so that no more sinful practices sneak into Germany.

15] Furthermore, God established marriage as a help against human weakness. **16]** The **church laws** themselves state that the old strictness ought now and then, in the latter times, to be relaxed because of human weakness. This should also be done in this matter. **17]** It should be expected that the churches shall at some time be short of pastors if marriage remains forbidden.

18] Yet although the commandment of God remains in force and the practice of the church is well known, and although the impure life of these supposedly celibate priests continues to cause many scandals, adulteries, and other crimes that deserve the punishments of just magistrates, yet it is a marvel that more cruelty is shown in regard to the marriage of priests than in anything else. **19]** God has commanded us to honor marriage. **20]** Marriage is most highly honored by the laws of all well-ordered societies, even among the heathen. **21]** But now men, and priests at that, are cruelly put to death, contrary to the intent of the church laws, for no other reason except that they are married. **22]** Paul says that it is a doctrine of devils which forbids marriage (1 Timothy 4:1,3). **23]** This is very understandable when laws against marriage are maintained by such penalties.

24] But just as no law made by humans can overrule a commandment of God, in the same way no human vow can do away with it. **25]** Thus, **Cyprian** advises women who cannot remain pure as they have promised to get married. He says, "If they are unwilling or unable to remain unmarried, it is better for them to marry than to fall into the fire through their lusts. They should not be offending their brothers and sisters by doing this" (Letter 62).

26] It was a common practice until now for very young people to take such vows. Even church laws were less strict in such cases.

Article 24: About the Mass

1] Our churches are falsely accused of doing away with the **mass**, for we have kept the mass and celebrate it with the highest reverence. **2]** We also continue nearly all the usual cere-

monies, except that we now sing German as well as Latin hymns. These were added to teach the people. **3]** For ceremonies are needed for this reason alone, to teach the uneducated people what they need to know about Christ. **4]** Paul commanded the church to use a language understood by the people (1 Corinthians 14:2,9). But human laws also demand this same thing. **5]** Those who are properly prepared are used to taking part in the Sacrament together, and this also increases the reverence and devotion of public worship. **6]** For no one can take part unless he is first examined. **7]** The people are also taught about the dignity and use of the Sacrament and what a great comfort it brings to troubled consciences. In this way they learn to trust in God and to expect and ask from him all that is good. **8]** In this connection they are also instructed about other false teachings on the Sacrament. This kind of worship pleases God, and proper use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion toward God. **9]** Therefore, it does not appear that our enemies celebrate the mass more devoutly than we do.

10] But it is clear that for a long time there has been another very serious and open complaint coming from many good men—that masses have been used in a sinful way as **a way of making money**. **11]** For it is well known that in all the churches all kinds of people have seen masses only being said for fees or stipends. And many men celebrate them contrary to church laws. **12]** But Paul severely threatens those who treat the Lord's Supper unworthily when he says, "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27). **13]** When, therefore, our priests were made aware of this sin, **private masses** were discontinued among us, since hardly any private masses were celebrated except for the sake of money.

14] Nor were these abuses unknown to the bishops. If they had corrected them over time, there would be less conflict between us now. **15]** But until the present they have allowed many corruptions to creep into the church by their own schemes. **16]** Now, when it is too late, they have begun to complain about the troubles in the church. But this disturbance has simply been caused by these abuses, which were so clear that they could no longer be endured. **17]** There have been great arguments about the mass and about the Sacrament. **18]** Perhaps the world is being punished for such long-time misuse of the mass as has been allowed to go on in the churches for so many centuries, and this by the very men who were both able and had the duty to correct them! **19]** For in the Ten Commandments it is written, "The LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exodus 20:7). **20]** But since the world began, nothing that God ever established seems to have been so abused for filthy money as the mass.

a way of making money—For a fee, people could have a priest say the mass in the name and for the spiritual benefit of some loved one.

private masses—Many masses were not public church services but simply private ones being done in the name of some other person not present.

satisfaction—Payment for sin.

venial and mortal—The church divided sins into these two groups. *Venial sins* were less serious. *Mortal sins* were so serious that a person would go to hell if he died before confessing such sins to a priest and receiving absolution for them.

Ambrose—See note in Article 6. This quote is from his book *On the Sacraments* 5.4.25.

holy day—Sunday and other church festivals.

21] Another idea was also added that greatly increased private masses—that by his suffering and death Christ had made **satisfaction** only for original sin and that he instituted the mass as a way in which an offering could be made for daily sins, both **venial and mortal.** **22]** From this has arisen the common idea that the mass takes away the sins of the living and the dead just by taking part in the outward act. **23]** Then the debate began as to whether one mass said for many people was worth as much as special masses performed for individuals. As a result, an endless number of masses began to be said. By doing this, people wished to receive from God all that they needed, and in the mean time faith in Christ and true worship were forgotten.

24] Our teachers have warned that these ideas are not in agreement with the Holy Scriptures and that they lessen the glory of the suffering of Christ. **25]** For Christ's suffering and death was an offering and satisfaction not only for original guilt but also for all other sins; as it is written in the letter to the Hebrews: **26]** "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10). **27]** Also, "By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (10:14). Never before had the church taught that Christ by his death made satisfaction only for original sin and not for all other sin as well. So we hope that everybody will understand that we had good reason to correct this error.

28] Scripture also teaches that, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, we are justified before God through faith in Christ. **29]** Now if the mass takes away the sins of the living and the dead just by performing this outward act, then justification comes through the saying of masses and not through faith. Scripture does not allow for such a teaching.

30] But Christ commands us, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Therefore the mass was instituted so that the faith of those who use the Sacrament should remember the benefits it receives through Christ. Such faith will cheer and comfort the troubled conscience. **31]** For to remember Christ is to remember the benefits he gives and to realize that they are truly offered to us. **32]** Nor is it enough just to remember the story of the Last Supper, because the Jews and the ungodly can also remember that. **33]** Therefore the mass has the following purpose: to give the Sacrament to those who need comfort. As **Ambrose** says, "Because I always sin, I always need to take the medicine." Therefore this Sacrament requires faith and is useless without faith.

34] Now, since the mass is the giving of the Sacrament, we hold one Communion every **holy day**, and, if anyone wishes to take the Sacrament, we offer it also on other days, at which time it is

given to all who ask for it. **35]** And this custom is not new in the church. For the church fathers before **Gregory** do not mention anything about private masses, but they say much about the common mass. **36]** **Chrysostom** says, “The priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to partake in Communion and keeping back others.” **37]** And it would seem from the ancient church laws that one person celebrated the mass and from him all the other elders and deacons received the body of the Lord. **38]** For one of the decisions of the **Council of Nicaea** says, “Let the deacons, according to their order, receive the Holy Communion after the elders, from the bishop or from an elder.” **39]** And Paul commands concerning Communion, “Wait for each other” (1 Corinthians 11:33), so that you may participate together.

40] Thus we celebrate the mass according to the example of the church, taken from the Scriptures and the church fathers. And so we are confident that no one can object to our practice, especially since we have kept up most of the public ceremonies just as they were done before. We have only reduced the number of masses, which should be reduced since there are so many clear abuses. **41]** For in ancient times, the mass was not celebrated every day even in the busiest churches, as the *Tripartite History* says, “Again in Alexandria, every Wednesday and Friday the Scriptures are read, and the teachers explain them, and everything else is done, except the solemn rite of Communion” (Book 9, chapter 33).

Article 25: About Confession

1] We have not done away with confession in our churches. For normally we do not give the body of the Lord to someone unless he has previously been examined and forgiveness has been announced. **2]** We teach our people very carefully about faith in the absolution. Until now there was complete silence on that subject. **3]** We teach our people to highly prize absolution as being the voice of God and pronounced by God’s command. **4]** We explain to them the **power of the keys** in all its beauty and remind them what great comfort it brings to troubled consciences. We also teach that God requires faith to believe that the absolution is a voice sounding from heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins. Until now all the emphasis was put on doing works of satisfaction. **5]** Nothing was said about faith, the merit earned by Christ, and the righteousness that comes by faith. Therefore our churches cannot be blamed in any way for this matter. **6]** For even our opponents have to admit that our teachers have diligently taught and explained the doctrine of repentance.

7] On the subject of confession, we teach that it is not necessary to recite all of one’s sins and that a person’s conscience need

Gregory—Gregory I, bishop of Rome from 590 to 604.

Chrysostom—John Chrysostom was a famous Christian leader in the East and bishop of Constantinople from 398 to 403. This quote is from a sermon on Ephesians.

Council of Nicaea—This council, held in 325, was the first council with representatives from East and West (the First Ecumenical Council). This subject is covered in decision (or Canon) 18 of the council.

Tripartite History—A history of the early church written about 550. It was made up of quotations from three other histories. The selections were translated from Greek into Latin by the monk Epiphanius under the direction of another famous monk and scholar, Cassiodorus.

power of the keys—The power Christ gave to his disciples to announce forgiveness to those who repent and condemnation to those who do not repent.

Decretum/Chrysostom—The *Decretum* of Gratian was a collection of church laws made about 1150. In it are cited these words from the 31st sermon on Hebrews by John Chrysostom (see note in Article 24).

note—It reads: “It is more accurate to say that confession was begun as a tradition of the universal church rather than by the authority of the Old Testament or New Testament.”

not be troubled to list all sins. For it is impossible for a person to recount all his sins, as Psalm 19:12 clearly says, “Who can discern his errors?” **8]** Also Jeremiah says, “The heart is deceitful above all things. . . . Who can understand it?” (17:9). If the only sins that were forgiven were those that were recited during confession, the consciences of people would never be at peace. **9]** For there are very many sins that people either do not realize they have done or that later they cannot remember. **10]** The early church writers also show that it was not necessary to recite all one’s sins. **11]** For in the *Decretum*, **Chrysostom** is quoted as follows: “I am not telling you to confess in public, nor to accuse yourself in front of others. But I do want you to obey the prophet who says: ‘Commit your way to the LORD’ (Psalm 37:5). Therefore confess your sins before God, the true judge, in your prayers. Tell him your errors, not with the tongue but with the memory of your conscience.” **12]** In a **note** to the *Decretum*’s section *On Repentance* (Distinction 5, chapter “Consider”), it says that confession is only a human custom; it is not commanded by Scripture but was established by the church. **13]** Nevertheless, we have kept confession because of the great benefit of absolution and because it also brings peace to people’s consciences.

Article 26: On Making Rules about Certain Foods

1] Both the people and the teachers in the church have usually thought that following rules about eating or not eating certain foods, and other such human traditions, are good deeds that are rewarded by grace. By doing such things, they thought they could pay the penalty for their sins. **2]** That the world truly believes this is shown by the fact that new ceremonies, new regulations, new holy days, and new fasts were coming into being almost every day. Even the teachers in the churches required the people to do these works in order to earn God’s grace. Because of this teaching, the consciences of people became terrified whenever they failed to do any of these things. **3]** This teaching about traditions has brought much harm to the church.

4] First of all, this teaching has kept people from seeing clearly the doctrine of grace and of the righteousness of faith. These are the most important parts of the gospel, and they should stand out as the church’s most important teachings. Only then can the merit that Christ earned for us be well known, and then faith, which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, can be seen to be far more important than our good works. **5]** It is for this reason that Paul also lays the greatest stress on this teaching. He sets aside obeying the law and human traditions so that he can demonstrate that Christian righteousness is something other than doing such works. Instead, Christian right-

eousness comes from a faith which believes that sins are freely forgiven for Christ's sake.

6] However, this teaching of Paul has been almost completely buried by human traditions. So people have come to believe that they must earn God's grace and righteousness by not eating certain foods and by doing other similar good works. **7]** In discussing repentance, the teachers never mentioned faith. Instead, they emphasized paying for sins by doing good works, as if repentance were completely made up of such things.

8] Second, because such traditions were thought to be far more important than God's commandments, they have also made it difficult for people to understand what God truly has commanded. To be a Christian meant but one thing—to celebrate certain holy days, to follow certain rituals and fasts, and to wear special clothing. **9]** People who did these things were said to be living a spiritual life and a perfect life. **10]** But in the meantime many of these same Christians were not following the commandments God had given to people in their situations in life. For example, a father should properly bring up his children, a mother should bear children, and a prince must govern his kingdom well. All these were considered only worldly and imperfect deeds, far less important than observing those showy ceremonies. **11]** This error brought great pain to the consciences of good Christians who were sorry that they had to spend their lives in less holy life situations, such as marriage, government offices, or other such occupations. On the other hand, they admired people like the monks, and they wrongly thought that the life those men led was more acceptable to God than their own lives.

12] Third, traditions brought consciences into great danger because it is impossible to follow all traditions perfectly. Yet people thought that doing so was the proper way for them to worship God. **13]** **Gerson** writes that many people fell into despair, and some even took their own lives, because they felt that they were not able to follow all traditions properly. All the while they had never heard any of the comfort that the righteousness of faith and grace brings. **14]** We see how the church scholars and theologians gather these traditions into books. They try to find ways to bring relief to the consciences of those people who can only carry out these traditions part way. Yet they did not succeed in unlocking these chains. In fact, at times they caused even more despair for these consciences. **15]** Scholars and sermon writers have been so busy gathering these traditions that they have had no time to teach the Scriptures. They have no time to point people to the more useful doctrines of faith, the cross, hope, the importance of serving one's community, and of comfort being brought to badly troubled consciences. **16]** Therefore, Gerson

Gerson—Jean Gerson, head of the University of Paris for many years beginning in 1395. The writers here refer to his work *On the Spiritual Life*, lecture 2.

Augustine—See note in Article 18. Here his *Letter 54* to a certain Januarius is mentioned.

and some other theologians have complained bitterly that they have spent so much time dealing with quarrels about these traditions that they have no time left to give attention to a better type of teaching. **17]** **Augustine** also wrote that people’s consciences must not be burdened with observing such traditions. Instead, he wisely advises Januarius to remember that Christians are not forced to observe such traditions.

18] For these reasons, it should be clear that our teachers have not objected to these customs without first studying them carefully. Nor have they done so because they hate bishops, as some have wrongly thought. **19]** But there was a great need to warn the churches of these errors, which had come about through a wrong understanding of these traditions. **20]** For the gospel compels us to insist in our churches on the teaching of grace and of the righteousness of faith. These cannot be properly understood if people think that they earn grace by keeping the traditions that they choose to keep.

21] As a result, our pastors have taught that we cannot earn God’s grace or be justified in his sight by following human traditions. Therefore we must not think that keeping such traditions are acts of worship that are necessary for all Christians. **22]** In addition, we add the following witness from Scripture:

- Christ defends his apostles when they had not kept the usual traditions, which shows that such things were not matters of the law, but were just customs, similar to the washings of the law (Matthew 15:3).
- He also says, “They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men” (Matthew 15:9) **23]** He, therefore, does not demand some useless act of worship.
- Shortly after he adds, “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him unclean” (Matthew 15:11).
- **24]** So also Paul, “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking” (Romans 14:17).
- **25]** “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day” (Colossians 2:16).
- **26]** “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’?” (Colossians 2:20,21)
- **27]** Peter writes, “Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We

believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (Acts 15:10,11). **28]** Here Peter forbids the church to burden peoples’ consciences by insisting that they follow many rites, either those of Moses or of anyone else.

- **29]** And in 1 Timothy 4:1,3 Paul says that when people demand that you not eat meat it is “things taught by demons,” for it is contrary to the gospel to institute or to do such deeds for the purpose of earning God’s grace, as though Christianity could not exist without doing such deeds for God.

30] Here our opponents object that our teachers are against discipline and putting our flesh to death, like **Jovinian** was. But if you read the writings of our teachers you will see the opposite is true. **31]** For we have always taught that Christians should bear their crosses and sufferings. **32]** This is the true, serious, and honest way of putting one’s sinful flesh to death, namely, to undergo various sufferings and thus to be crucified with Christ.

33] Moreover, we teach that all Christians ought to train and control their desires. They should do this with self-control and physical exercises and works. In this way they will not be tempted to sin either by too much or too little activity. Yet we cannot earn God’s grace or pay for our sins by doing these things. **34]** And we should urge our people to follow this kind of external discipline all the time, not just on a few special days. **35]** For Christ commands, “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life” (Luke 21:34), **36]** and again, “But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21, footnote). **37]** Paul also says, “I beat my body and make it my slave” (1 Corinthians 9:27). **38]** Here he clearly shows that he was keeping control of his own body. He did not do this to earn forgiveness of his sins but to have his body under control and fit for spiritual things. He also did it so he could better carry out the duties of his call. **39]** Therefore, we do not condemn fasting in and of itself, but we warn against the traditions that single out certain days to celebrate and certain meats that shouldn’t be eaten. For a person’s conscience is put in danger when he thinks that God requires people to serve him by doing such deeds.

40] Still, we have continued to observe many traditions that encourage good order in the church, such as using the appointed Scripture readings in the church service and celebrating the major church festivals. **41]** But, at the same time, we warn our people that these do not make people right with God. Not observing them should not be considered sinful if this is done without

Jovinian—A monk who (about A.D. 400) preached that people do not earn merit before God by good works such as celibacy. Jerome claimed (falsely) that he spoke against drowning the old Adam.

celebrated Easter at a different time—

The Eastern church celebrated Easter on the Jewish Passover, the 14th day of the month Nisan, no matter what day of the week it fell on. The Western church celebrated Easter on the Sunday after Passover.

Irenaeus—A bishop in France in the late second century. This quote comes from Eusebius' *Church History* 5.24.

Gregory—See note in Article 24, paragraph 35. He is quoted in Gratian's *Decretum*

Tripartite History—See note at the end of Article 24. This quote is from 9.38.

giving offense to the weak. **42]** The church fathers knew they had the freedom to celebrate or not to celebrate rites created by Christians. **43]** For in the Eastern church they **celebrated Easter at a different time** than the church at Rome. Because of this difference, the Roman church accused the Eastern church of causing a division in the church. But Rome was then admonished by others that such customs did not have to be the same everywhere. **44]** And **Irenaeus** says: "Differences about fasting do not destroy the unity of faith." Also Pope **Gregory** implies in Distinction 12 that such differences do not spoil the unity of the church. **45]** And in the *Tripartite History* of Cassiodorus, Book 9, many examples of different ceremonies are collected, and then the following statement is made: "The apostles did not try to establish rules about festivals, but rather to preach godliness and a holy life."

Article 27: About Monastic Vows

1] To understand what we teach about the vows taken by monks, a person must remember what the condition of the monasteries was and how many things were done every day in them that were contrary to church law. **2]** In St. Augustine's time monks lived together in free associations. Afterward, discipline became corrupted, and vows were added everywhere in order to restore discipline, just as in a carefully planned prison.

3] Gradually, many other observances were added besides these vows. **4]** Contrary to church law, these became chains that were laid upon many people while they were still younger than the lawful age for taking such vows.

5] Many people also entered this kind of life through ignorance. They were unable to judge their own strength, even though they were old enough to make their own decisions. **6]** But once they were trapped by these vows, they were forced to remain monks, even though some of them could have been freed according to church law. **7]** This was even more the case in convents of women than of men, although more consideration should have been shown to the weaker sex. **8]** This strict attitude displeased many good people in time past. They saw that young men and women were being put into convents so that the monasteries would provide them a place to live. They also saw what unfortunate results came of this, what scandals were created, and what traps were thrown on men's consciences. **9]** These people were upset that the authority of church law in such an important matter was totally ignored and despised. **10]** Then, as is well known, even tougher demands were added to these evils. These displeased the more thoughtful monks. **11]** It was taught that vows were equal to Baptism. By living this kind of life, they could earn

forgiveness of sins and be justified in God's eyes. **12]** They also said that the monastic life not only earned righteousness before God but even greater things, because it not only obeyed God's commandments but also the so-called "**gospel admonitions.**"

13] In this way they made people believe that living the life of a monk was far better than Baptism. They taught that the monastic life earned more merit before God than serving as a government official, serving as a pastor, or simply living one's life as God commanded without doing any of the works established by human beings. **14]** None of these facts can be denied, for they can be seen in their own books. Besides, a person who has been trapped in this way and has entered a monastery learns very little about Christ.

15] What, then, took place in the monasteries? In the old days they served as schools of theology and other types of learning that were useful to the church. In this way the church got its pastors and bishops. Now it is a different situation. We do not need to tell you what everyone knows. **16]** Monks used to gather together to learn. Now they pretend that it is a type of life established to earn grace and righteousness. They preach that it is a perfect way of life, and they put it far above all other kinds of life established by God. **17]** We have repeated these things without exaggerating them so that what we teach about this matter could be better understood.

18] First, as far as marriage is concerned, we teach that it is lawful for any person who is unable to live a single life to marry, for vows cannot do away with God's laws and commandments. **19]** The command of God is, "Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife" (1 Corinthians 7:2). **20]** God not only commanded this but also created and instructed people this way. Yet, although they are exceptions to the rule, there are people whom God has created to live singly. Yet according to Genesis 2:18, "It is not good for the man to be alone." **21]** Therefore the people who obey this commandment and law of God are not sinning when they get married.

22] How can anyone object to this? People can praise the duties of a vow as much as they want, yet they cannot change the fact that such vows do away with the commandment of God. **23]** Even church law teaches that vows are not binding when someone who has authority (such as a bishop or pope) releases that person from his vow. In the same way, God's commands must overrule vows that are contrary to his Word.

24] Now, if the duty involved in vows cannot be changed for any reason whatsoever, then the Roman popes could never have

gospel admonitions—Monks were thought to earn God's favor not only by obeying the Ten Commandments but also by obeying what they thought were additional New Testament rules mentioned in the gospel. These extra gospel admonitions were sometimes listed as the three vows that all monks took—poverty, chastity, and obedience. Others listed 12 admonitions, such as "Don't seek revenge," "Turn the other cheek," "Pray for those who persecute you," and so on.

King of Aragon—Ramiro II became king of Aragon in 1134. He had been a monk until his brother the king died without leaving any children to rule.

given anyone exemption from them. For it is not lawful for a human being to cancel a divine law. **25]** But the Roman popes have wisely decided that they should at times be lenient with these obligations. As a result, we read that they have often excused people from keeping their vows. **26]** There is the well-known case of the **King of Aragon** who was called back after entering a monastery. There are other examples from our own time. Now, if exemptions have been granted to deal with earthly problems, it is much more proper that they be granted in order to overcome the distress of people's souls.

27] Second, why do our opponents exaggerate the duty or effect of a vow? They don't say a word about the nature of the vow itself. They don't say that someone should only make a vow if it is possible to keep it. They don't say that vows should only be made by a person freely, of his own will and after much thought. **28]** But it is known that most people do not have the power to live a continually holy life. **29]** Only a few have taken their vows freely and after much thought! Young men and women are persuaded, and sometimes even forced, to take these vows before they are mature enough to make their own decisions. **30]** For this reason it is not fair to insist strictly that they keep these vows. Everyone agrees that it is not a proper vow unless it has been taken freely and after much thought.

31] Most church laws cancel any vows made before the age of 15. Before that age it does not seem that people have enough judgment to make decisions that will affect the rest of their lives. **32]** Another church law, recognizing human weakness even more, adds a few more years. It forbids making a vow before the age of 18. **33]** But which of these two church laws shall we follow? Most monks have an excuse for leaving the monasteries, because most of them took their vows before they reached either of these ages.

34] Finally, even though the church condemns the violation of a vow, yet it still does not follow that these people's marriages should be ended. **35]** For **Augustine** denies that they should be ended, and his authority cannot be treated lightly, even though other people later thought differently.

Augustine—See note in Article 18. This citation comes from his book *On the Goodness of Being a Widow*, chapter 9.

36] But although it seems that God's command about marriage rescues very many people from their vows, yet our teachers have brought forward another argument also about vows to show that vows are to be set aside. Every way of serving God is wicked which, without God's command, is chosen and set up by men in order to earn justification and grace. **37]** For Christ says, "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men" (Matthew 15:9). And Paul teaches in many

places that we must not try to become righteous by obeying the law or by acts of worship invented by men. Righteousness comes by faith to those who believe that they are received into grace by God for Christ's sake.

38] But it is clear that monks have taught that human works can earn forgiveness of sins and merit God's grace and justification. Does this do anything other than take away from the glory of Christ and hide and deny the righteousness of faith? **39]** This means that the vows that are normally taken have been wicked deeds and, therefore, are useless. A wicked vow, taken against the command of God, **40]** should not be kept. As church law says, No vow should tie people to wickedness.

41] Paul says, "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4). **42]** Therefore, those who want to be justified by their vows lose Christ and fall from grace. **43]** Those who say that vows can produce justification are giving to their own works the power that properly belongs to Christ's glory.

44] Nor can it be denied, indeed, that the monks have taught that they were justified and earned forgiveness of sins by their vows and observances. Yes, they invented still greater foolishness by saying that they could share their good works with others. **45]** If anyone wanted to, he could gather even more examples of these evil things of which the monks are now ashamed! **46]** They also convinced people that, although men had invented the monastic life, it was a way that men could live a perfect Christian life. **47]** Is this not just another way of trying to earn justification by good works? **48]** In the church it is not a small sin to urge people to do some deed thought up by men without the command of God, and then to teach that such works justify people before God. That righteousness comes by faith is the most important teaching in the church. It is clouded when these wonderful angel-like forms of worship, with their display of poverty, humility, and celibacy, are held up as examples before the people's eyes.

49] Furthermore, people cannot clearly understand the commands of God and the true way to serve God when they are told that only monks are in a state of perfection. For Christian perfection means to fear God from the heart, and yet to have great faith, and to trust that we have a God who has been reconciled because of what Christ has done. Christian perfection means to ask and to certainly expect God's aid in all that we do to carry out our roles in life. And it means, at the same time, to always outwardly be doing good works and carrying out our calling. **50]** True perfection and the true service of God is found in just these things. It is not found in remaining unmarried, in begging,

or in wearing ragged clothes. **51]** But the people come up with many evil ideas because of the false praises given to monastic life. **52]** They hear celibacy praised more than it should be. Therefore they live their own married lives with guilty consciences. **53]** They hear that only those who own nothing are perfect. Therefore they keep their own possessions and carry on their own business with guilty consciences. **54]** At the same time they are told that it is good scriptural advice not to seek revenge. As a result, some people are not afraid to take revenge in their private lives, for they have been told that this is only advice and not a commandment. **55]** Others decide that a Christian cannot properly hold a government office or position.

56] There are written accounts of men who gave up their marriages and their government offices in order to hide themselves in monasteries. **57]** They called this “escaping from the world” and “seeking a lifestyle that would be more pleasing to God.” But they did not understand that God should be served by obeying the commands which he himself has given us and not by obeying commands invented by men. **58]** A good and perfect kind of life is that which has been commanded by God. **59]** It is necessary for us to warn people of these things.

Gerson—See note in Article 26, paragraph 13.

60] In previous times, **Gerson** wrote against this error of the monks about perfection. He said that in his day it was a new teaching that those living a monastic life are living in a state of perfection.

61] So many wicked ideas are wrapped up in these vows—that they justify, that they are a life of Christian perfection, that they are fulfilling the counsels and commandments, that they have **works of supererogation**. All of these false and empty ideas make vows useless and nonbinding.

works of supererogation—According to Roman Catholic teaching, these were good deeds that were not required of all Christians. They were over and above what was normal, and therefore they were supposed to earn extra merit in God’s sight.

Article 28—The Latin text entitles this article “About the Power of the Church.”

use the sword—The use of weapons to keep the peace and punish those who break the law.

power of the keys—See note in Article 25, paragraph 4.

reserving the right to judge certain cases—See paragraph 41.

Article 28: About the Power of Bishops

1] There have been big arguments about the power of bishops because some people have wrongly confused the power of the church and the government’s power to **use the sword**. **2]** Very large wars and unrest have resulted from this confusion. In the meantime the popes, made bold by the **power of the keys**, have established new duties and burdened people’s consciences by **reserving the right to judge certain cases** and by heartlessly excommunicating people. They have even become involved in appointing and deposing the kings and emperors of this world. **3]** Learned and godly men have long since spoken against these evils in the church. **4]** Therefore, in order to comfort people’s consciences, our teachers were forced to show the difference between the power of the church and the power of the government. They

taught that both of them, because of God’s commands, are to be revered and honored as great blessings of God on earth.

5] Therefore we teach the following: That according to the gospel, the power that the bishops have is the power of the keys—the power or command of God to preach the gospel, to forgive and not to forgive sins, and to administer the sacraments.

6] For Christ sent out his apostles with this command, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:21,23). **7]** “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

8] This power is used only by teaching or preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, either to groups of people or to individuals, depending on a person’s calling. For in this way not earthly but eternal gifts are given, such as eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. **9]** These things can only come through the ministry of the word and the sacraments. As Paul says, “The gospel . . . is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). **10]** Therefore, since the power of the church gives eternal gifts, and comes only through the ministry of the Word, it does not interfere with civil government any more than a career in singing interferes with civil government. **11]** For civil government deals with very different things from the gospel. Earthly rulers do not defend minds; they defend bodies and other earthly possessions against visible injuries. They use weapons and the threat of physical punishment to get people to obey the law. In this way they seek to keep the peace and give earthly justice.

12] That is why the power of the church and the power of civil government must not be confused. The church’s power comes from its command to teach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. **13]** The church should not involve itself in civil duties. The church should not get involved in appointing or deposing worldly governments. The church should not do away with the laws made by civil rulers. The church should encourage people to obey laws that have been properly made. The church should not interfere in court decisions about earthly laws or contracts. The church should not tell earthly rulers what laws should be passed about the form of government. **14]** As Christ says, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), **15]** and again, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an **arbiter** between you?” (Luke 12:14). **16]** Paul also says: “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20) **17]** and “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

arbiter—A person who tries to bring two sides to agreement in a dispute.

18] In this way our teachers distinguish between the duties of these two powers and command that both be honored and recognized as gifts and blessings of God.

19] Church leaders have not received any power to use human weapons as part of their command to use the gospel. However, human laws (passed by kings and emperors) allow church leaders to use force to rule their earthly property. This, however, is a role different than their ministry of the gospel.

20] When, therefore, there is a question about the authority of bishops, their civil authority must be distinguished from their authority in the church. **21]** Again, according to the gospel or, as they say, by divine right, the church authority of bishops gives them no power except to forgive sins, to judge doctrine, to reject doctrines that are contrary to the gospel, and to expel from church fellowship those wicked people whose wickedness is known. They are to do this without human force, simply by using the Word. **22]** In spiritual matters like these, Scripture commands that congregations should obey their bishops. As Luke 10:16 says, “He who listens to you listens to me.” **23]** But when bishops teach or decree anything contrary to the gospel, then the congregations have a command from God not to obey them: “Watch out for false prophets” (Matthew 7:15) **24]** and “If we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned” (Galatians 1:8). **25]** Again, “For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth; **26]** . . . the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down” (2 Corinthians 13:8,10). **27]** **Church law** also commands this. **28]** And **Augustine** in his letter against Petilian says, “We should not submit even to the bishops of the orthodox church if they happen to go astray or believe anything contrary to the Word of God.”

church law—Gratian’s *Decretum* is again quoted here (Part 2, Question 7, Chapter 8 [“On Priests”] and Chapter 13 [“On Sheep”]).

Augustine—See note in Article 18. The quotation is from *On the Unity of the Church* (11:28), written in answer to attacks by another North African church leader named Petilian.

29] If the bishops use their authority to listen to and sit in judgment over certain court cases, such as cases involving marriages, the paying of tithes, and the like, they do it because human authorities have given this power to them. When they fail to settle such matters, princes are bound even against their will to bring justice to their subjects and so maintain peace.

30] It is also debated whether bishops or pastors have the right to introduce ceremonies in the church and to make laws about eating meat, celebrating holy days, about the various levels or types of ministry, and so on. **31]** Those who say that bishops have this right, refer to this passage, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:12,13).

32] They also refer to the example of the apostles, who commanded Christians not to eat blood and animals that had been strangled (Acts 15:29). **33]** They say that the Sabbath Day was changed into the Lord's Day, although this seems to be contrary to the Ten Commandments. There is no example they make so much of as this changing of the Sabbath Day. The power of the church is very great, they say, since it has done away with one of the Ten Commandments!

34] But on this subject we have taught (as has been shown in paragraph 23 and Article 23, paragraph 24) that bishops have no power to make any decree that is contrary to the gospel. **Church law** teaches the same thing. **35]** Now, to set up new traditions or require people to keep any traditions in order to earn forgiveness of sins or to earn grace and righteousness, is contrary to Scripture. **36]** For the glory of what Christ has done for us is dishonored when we try to earn justification by keeping such laws. **37]** But it is obvious that, because of such beliefs, an endless number of traditions have multiplied in the church. Meanwhile, the teaching about faith and the righteousness that comes by faith is being forgotten. For gradually more holy days were made, more fasting required, new ceremonies and duties in honor of saints begun. Those who invented them thought that by doing them they were earning God's grace. **38]** In this way the church greatly increased the laws about repentance. The evidence of this can still be seen in what is being required for complete forgiveness.

39] Again, those who invent traditions are acting contrary to the command of God when they consider it sinful to eat certain foods, not to celebrate certain days, and such things. In this way they burden the church with the chains of the law, as if Christians ought to perform a service like the **Old Testament laws for Levites**, in order to earn justification. It is as if God commanded the apostles and bishops to arrange this new law. **40]** Some writers have said such things, and the popes to some extent seem to be misled by the example of the Law of Moses. **41]** Some of these burdens are the following:

- that it is a mortal sin to do physical work on holy days, even when this does not offend others;
- that it is a mortal sin not to **worship at prescribed times each day**;
- that certain foods make the conscience unclean;
- that fasting is a good work that satisfies God;
- that sin in a **reserved case** cannot be forgiven except by the authority of the person who reserved it, whereas

Church law—The reference is to the *Decretum* written by Gratian, Part 1, Distinction 9.

Old Testament laws for Levites—The tribe of Levites in the Old Testament was given the responsibility for assisting the priests in carrying out the sacrifices and other religious duties at the Tent of Meeting. Thus the laws about sacrifices and religious ceremonies came to be called Levitical laws. The third book of the Old Testament, which described these laws, came to be called Leviticus.

worship at prescribed times each day—A series of seven daily worship services had developed over time. These were observed by monks, as well as some other Christians.

a reserved case—A situation that is so serious that church law had decided that only bishops could announce forgiveness and absolution. In some cases only the chief bishop, the pope, could do this.

church law itself speaks only of the reserving of a church penalty and not to the reserving of guilt.

42] How do the bishops come to have the right to force these traditions on the church and thus trap consciences? Peter forbids putting a yoke on the neck of the believers (Acts 15:10). And Paul says that the power given him was for building up and not for destroying (2 Corinthians 13:10). Why, then, do the bishops increase people's sins by requiring them to obey these traditions?

43] But there are clear passages that say people must not create such traditions, as though they earned grace or were necessary to salvation. **44]** Paul says, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. . . . **45]** Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!?' These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom" (Colossians 2:16,20-23).

46] Also in Titus 1:14, Paul openly forbids traditions, saying to "pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth."

47] And Christ says about the people who require Christians to follow traditions, "Leave them; they are blind guides" (Matthew 15:14). **48]** He rejects such deeds when he says, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots" (Matthew 15:13).

49] If bishops have the right to lay upon churches the burden of countless traditions and to trap consciences, why does the Bible so often forbid people from making and listening to traditions? Why does it call them "things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1)? Did the Holy Spirit warn about these things for nothing?

50] Therefore, those rules are contrary to the gospel which are set up as being necessary or with the thought that they will earn grace. And so it is against God's law for any bishop to make such demands, as if they are a way of serving God. **51]** For it is necessary that the teaching about Christian liberty be preserved in the churches, that is, that it is not necessary to keep the law to be justified before God. As it is written in the letter to the Galatians, "Do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (5:1). **52]** It is necessary that the main teaching of the gospel be preserved, that is, that we receive grace freely by faith in Christ and not by obeying certain traditions or acts of worship invented by humans.

53] What, then, should we think about our Sunday services and other ceremonies in God's house? We answer that bishops or pastors have the right to regulate affairs so that things are done in an orderly way in the church. But this should not be thought of as a way to earn God's grace or pay for our sins. We can neither bind consciences by declaring that people must do these things, nor can we say that it is a sin not to obey them. By such claims we will cause offense to others. **54]** So Paul declares that women should cover their heads in the congregation (1 Corinthians 11:5) and that interpreters should be heard in an orderly way in the church (14:30), and so forth.

55] As long as it does not offend others, churches may properly follow such customs in order to preserve love and peace. In this way all things will be done in the churches in an orderly way and without any confusion (1 Corinthians 14:40; compare Philippians 2:14). **56]** They should do this in such a way that no consciences will be burdened by thinking that obeying these customs is necessary for salvation. And no one will think that they are sinning when they do not observe them yet do not offend others. For example, no one should say that a woman sins who goes out in public with her head uncovered, as long as she does not give offense by doing so.

57] Observing **the Lord's Day, Easter, Pentecost**, and other holy days and rituals are customs of this kind. **58]** For those people make a big mistake by claiming that the church by its authority has decreed that Christians must worship on Sunday rather than the Sabbath Day. **59]** For it was Scripture that did away with the observance of the Sabbath Day. The Bible teaches that since the gospel has now been revealed, none of the ceremonies of the law of Moses need be followed. **60]** Yet, since a day did have to be chosen so that Christians would know when they should gather for worship, it seems that the Christians chose Sunday for this purpose. It seems that this day was chosen for another reason as well. It gives people an example of how to use their Christian freedom, and shows them that it is not necessary to observe the Sabbath nor any other day in particular.

61] There are a great number of arguments about the changing of the law, the ceremonies of the new law, and the changing of the Sabbath Day. All of these have arisen because of the false belief that the church must have some set of laws, like the **Old Testament Levitical laws**, and the false belief that Christ had commanded his apostles and bishops to invent new ceremonies that people must obey to be saved. **62]** These errors slipped into the church when it was not being taught clearly that righteousness comes by faith. **63]** Some people argue that worshiping on Sunday may not *be* a command of God, but it is *like* a command of

the Lord's Day—Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection. It is by human decision that the church worships on Sunday, and also has set up a church year with other festivals (**Easter, Pentecost**, Christmas, and such).

Old Testament Levitical laws—See note in paragraph 39.

God. Then they make laws about how much work can be done on these holy days. **64]** Such arguments only become traps for people's consciences. For although they try to change the traditions, yet this lessening cannot bring real improvement as long as the thought remains that they are necessary. This will be the case wherever the righteousness of faith and Christian liberty are not properly understood.

not to eat meat with the blood still in it—Old Testament law said that animals had to be killed in a certain way and the blood drained before eating their meat. Then it was considered clean, or *kosher*, to eat.

65] The apostles commanded Christians **not to eat meat with the blood still in it** (Acts 15:20). Who obeys this command in our day? And yet the people who do not obey it are not sinning. For even the apostles themselves did not wish to burden people's consciences with such chains. To avoid causing offense, they banned for a time the eating of meat with the blood still in it. **66]** For this decree must always remind us what the purpose of the gospel is.

67] Almost no church laws are kept exactly. Every day many customs go out of use even among those people who are the most eager supporters of traditions. **68]** Nor can consciences be properly cared for unless these customs are changed in the following way: Church laws may be obeyed if this is done without teaching that they are necessary. And consciences should not be harmed, even when traditions change.

69] But the bishops might easily get the people to obey these customs if they would not insist that they keep traditions which cannot be kept with a good conscience. **70]** They now demand that priests remain unmarried. They let no one become a priest unless he first swears that he will *not* teach the pure doctrine of the gospel. **71]** The churches are not asking that the bishops should restore harmony while losing their honor. Nevertheless, it would be proper for good pastors to do just that. **72]** We ask only that they would do away with the unjust burdens that are new and have been brought in contrary to the customs of the **catholic church**. **73]** It may be that in the beginning there were understandable reasons for some of these laws. And yet they are not useful for the church today. **74]** It is also clear that some of these laws were adopted because of false ideas. Therefore it would be proper that the popes, out of kindness, change these customs now, for such changes do not shake the unity of the church. For many human traditions have been changed over time, as the church laws themselves show. **75]** But if it is impossible to reduce those customs that cannot be obeyed without sinning, then we are bound to follow the apostolic rule of Acts 5:29, which commands us to obey God rather than men.

catholic church—See note in Article 21, paragraph 5.

76] Peter forbids bishops to be lords and to rule over the churches (1 Peter 5:3). **77]** It is not now our plan to take earthly

power away from the bishops. We ask only this one thing—that they allow the gospel to be taught purely and that they do away with a few customs which cannot be obeyed without sinning.

78] But if they do not allow this, they will have to decide how they will answer to God. For by their stubbornness, they are creating a reason for the church to be divided.

• Conclusion •

indulgences—The forgiving of punishment by purchase, through special prayers, or by making trips (**pilgrimages**) to holy sites. This practice caused Luther to write his Ninety-five Theses.

excommunications—The church at times excommunicated kings or princes and their entire kingdoms. Thus excommunication was being used as a political weapon.

parochial right—Arguments about whether the monks have the right to conduct services in the parishes assigned to local pastors.

catholic church—See note in Article 21, paragraph 5.

See the Historical Introduction at the beginning of the book to learn more about the men who signed the Augsburg Confession.

1] These then are the main teachings about which there is disagreement. For although we could have listed even more abuses, yet, to avoid making this too long, we have stayed with the main points. The rest can be easily judged from these.

2] There have been serious complaints about **indulgences, pilgrimages,** and the improper use of **excommunications.** Congregations have been troubled in many ways by the sellers of indulgences. There have been countless arguments between the pastors and the monks about the **parochial right,** confessions, burials, sermons on special occasions, and countless other things.

3] We have passed over problems of this kind so that, after briefly writing on these subjects, the main points in this matter could be more easily understood. **4]** Nor have we said or argued about anything here in order to lay blame on anyone. **5]** Rather we have only mentioned those things that we felt we had to discuss, so that it might be clearly understood that we have practiced no doctrine or ceremony which is contrary to either Scripture or the **catholic church.** For it is clear that we have been extremely careful that no new and ungodly doctrine should sneak into our churches.

6] We present the above teachings in answer to the command of Your Royal Majesty. In this way we wish to show what we confess and let men see a summary of the doctrine of our teachers.

7] If there are any additional points that someone wants us to cover in this confession, we are ready, God willing, to present fuller explanations according to the Scriptures.

Your Royal Majesty's faithful subjects:

*John, Duke of Saxony, Elector
George, Margrave of Brandenburg
Ernest, Duke of Lueneberg
Philip, Landgrave of Hesse
John Frederick, Duke of Saxony
Francis, Duke of Lueneburg
Wolfgang, Prince of Anhalt
Senate and Magistracy of Nuremberg
Senate of Reutlingen*