

THE LARGE CATECHISM

INTRODUCTION TO THE LARGE CATECHISM

Once the Evangelical churches had achieved some external stability, the need was to strengthen them internally. Luther had already produced a number of sermons and pamphlets, beginning as far back as 1516, to present popular instruction on basic elements of Christian doctrine. In 1525 he assigned to his friends Justus Jonas and John Agricola the task of composing a book of religious instruction for children, which he referred to as a "catechism." When this work suffered delay, as did also an attempt in 1528 by Philip Melancthon, Luther took the initiative again. He assigned to Melancthon the composition of the "Instruction to the Visitors of the Clergy in the Electorate of Saxony" (1528) while he himself undertook the preparation of a catechism.

The immediate background material consists of three series of sermons which Luther preached in May, September, and November-December, 1528, and March, 1529. Before these sermons were ended Luther was at work writing the Large Catechism. Parts of it were sent to the press before the whole was completed, which helps to explain the discrepancies in the text of the Ten Commandments.

In April, 1529, the "German Catechism" appeared, printed by George Rhaw in Wittenberg. (The title "Large Catechism" is not Luther's.) Later the same year Luther issued a revised edition which added an "Exhortation to Confession," a lengthy insertion in the introduction to the explanation of the Lord's Prayer, and several marginal notes. This edition was the first to be illustrated, some of the cuts coming from Lucas Cranach the Elder. Another edition appeared in 1530, furnished with a second and longer preface which had probably been composed at the Coburg. The last revision corrected by Luther himself came out in 1538.

A Latin translation of the Large Catechism appeared in 1529 and a second edition in 1544, the work of a humanist, Vincent Obsopoeus, who undertook to make of it a stylistic showpiece by adorning it with classical citations and allusions to ancient history. Otherwise it is generally a slavish translation of Luther's German. It was not necessary, therefore, to reproduce here the Latin variations from the German text.

MARTIN LUTHER'S PREFACE¹

¹ It is not for trivial reasons that we constantly treat the Catechism and strongly urge others to do the same. For we see to our sorrow that many pastors and preachers² are very negligent in this respect and despise both their office and this teaching itself. Some because of their great and lofty learning, others because of sheer laziness and gluttony, behave in this matter as if they were pastors or preachers for their bellies' sake and had nothing to do but live off the fat of the land all their days, as they used to do under the papacy.

² Everything that they are to teach and preach is now available to them in clear and simple form in the many excellent books which are in reality what the old manuals claimed in their titles to be: "Sermons That Preach Themselves," "Sleep Soundly," "Prepared!" and "Treasury."³ However, they are not so upright and honest as to buy these books, or if they have them, to examine and read them. Such shameful gluttons and servants of their bellies would make better swineherds or dogkeepers than spiritual guides or pastors.

³ Now that they are free from the useless, bothersome babbling of the Seven Hours,⁴ it would be fine if every morning, noon, and evening they would read, instead, at least a page or two from the Catechism, the Prayer Book,⁵ the New Testament, or something else from the Bible and would pray the Lord's Prayer for themselves and their parishioners. In this way they might show honor and gratitude to the Gospel, through which they have been delivered from so many burdens and troubles, and they might feel a little shame because, like pigs and dogs, they remember no more of the Gospel than this rotten, pernicious, shameful, carnal liberty.⁴ As it is, the common people take the Gospel altogether too lightly, and even our utmost exertions accomplish but little. What, then, can we expect if we are sluggish and lazy, as we used to be under the papacy?

⁵ Besides, a shameful and insidious plague of security and boredom has overtaken us. Many regard the Catechism as a simple, silly teaching which they can absorb and master at one reading. After reading it once they toss the book into a corner as if they are ashamed to read it again.^(tr-569)⁶ Indeed, even among the nobility there are some louts and skinflints who declare that we can do without pastors and preachers from now on because they have everything in books and can learn it all by ourselves. So they blithely let parishes fall into decay, and brazenly allow both pastors and preachers to suffer distress and hunger. This is what one can expect of crazy Germans. We Germans have such disgraceful people among us and must put up with them.

⁷ As for myself, let me say that I, too, am a doctor and a preacher — yes, and as learned and experienced as any of those who act so high and mighty. Yet I do as a child who is being taught the Catechism. Every morning, and whenever else I have time, I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc.⁸ I must still read and study the Catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and I do it gladly. These dainty, fastidious fellows would like quickly, with one reading, to become doctors above all doctors, to know all there is to be known. Well, this, too, is a sure sign that they despise both their office and the people's souls, yes, even God and his Word. They need not fear a fall, for they have already fallen all too horribly. What they need is to become children and begin learning their ABC's, which they think they have outgrown long ago.

⁹ Therefore, I beg these lazy-bellies and presumptuous saints, for God's sake, to get it into their heads that they are not really and truly such learned and great doctors as they think. I implore them not to imagine that they have learned these parts of the Catechism perfectly, or at least sufficiently, even though they think they know them ever so well. Even if their knowledge of Catechism were perfect (though that is impossible in this life), yet it is highly profitable and fruitful daily to read it and make it the subject of meditation and conversation. In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and fervor, so that day by day we relish and appreciate the Catechism more greatly. This is according to Christ's promise in [Matt. 18:20](#), "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

¹⁰ Nothing is so effectual against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy oneself with the Word of God, talk about it, and meditate on it. [Psalm 1](#) calls those blessed who "meditate on God's law day and night."⁶ You will never offer up any incense or other savor more potent^(tr-571) against the devil than to occupy yourself with God's commandments and words and to speak, sing, and meditate on them. This, indeed, is the true holy water, the sign which routs the devil and puts him to flight.⁷

¹¹ For this reason alone you should eagerly read, recite, ponder, and practice the Catechism, even if the only blessing and benefit you obtain from it is to rout the devil and evil thoughts. For he cannot bear to hear God's Word. God's Word is not like some empty tale, such as the one about Dietrich of

Bern,⁸ but as St. Paul says in [Rom. 1:16](#), it is “the power of God,” indeed, the power of God which burns the devil and gives us immeasurable strength, comfort, and help.

¹² Why should I waste words? Time and paper would fail me if I were to recount all the blessings that flow from God’s Word. The devil is called the master of a thousand arts. What, then, shall we call God’s Word, which routs and destroys this master of a thousand arts with all his wiles and might? It must, indeed, be master of more than a hundred thousand arts.¹³ Shall we frivolously despise this might, blessing, power, and fruit — especially we who would be pastors and preachers? If so, we deserve not only to be refused food but also to be chased out by dogs and pelted with dung. Not only do we need God’s Word daily as we need our daily bread; we also must use it daily against the daily, incessant attacks and ambushes of the devil with his thousand arts.

¹⁴ If this were not enough to admonish us to read the Catechism daily, there is God’s command. That alone should be incentive enough. [Deut. 6:7, 8](#) solemnly enjoins that we should always meditate upon his precepts whether sitting, walking, standing, lying down, or rising, and keep them before our eyes and in our hands as a constant token and sign. Certainly God did not require and command this so solemnly without good reason. He knows our danger and need. He knows the constant and furious attacks and assaults of the devil. So he wishes to warn, equip, and protect us against them with good “armor” against their “flaming darts,”⁹ and with a good antidote against their evil infection and poison.

¹⁵ O what mad, senseless fools we are! We must ever live and dwell in the midst of such mighty enemies as the devils, and yet we despise our weapons and armor, too lazy to give them a thought!

¹⁶ Look at these bored, presumptuous saints who will not or cannot read and study the Catechism daily. They evidently consider themselves much wiser than ^(tr-573) God himself, and wiser than all his holy angels, prophets, apostles, and all Christians! God himself is not ashamed to teach it daily, for he knows of nothing better to teach, and he always keeps on teaching this one thing without varying it with anything new or different. All the saints know of nothing better or different to learn, though they cannot learn it to perfection. Are we not most marvelous fellows, therefore, if we imagine, after reading or hearing it once, that we know it all and need not read or study it any more? Most marvelous fellows, to think we can finish learning in one hour what God himself cannot finish teaching! Actually, he is busy teaching it from the beginning of the world to the end, and all prophets and saints have been busy learning it and have always remained pupils, and must continue to do so.

¹⁷ This much is certain: anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures. In all affairs and circumstances he can counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both spiritual and temporal matters. He is qualified to sit in judgment upon all doctrines, estates, persons, laws, and everything else in the world.

¹⁸ What is the whole Psalter but meditations and exercises based on the First Commandment? Now, I know beyond a doubt that such lazy-bellies and presumptuous fellows do not understand a single Psalm, much less the entire Scriptures, yet they pretend to know and despise the Catechism, which is a brief compend and summary of all the Holy Scriptures.

¹⁹ Therefore, I once again implore all Christians, especially pastors and preachers, not to try to be doctors prematurely and to imagine that they know everything. Vain imaginations, like new cloth, suffer shrinkage! Let all Christians exercise themselves in the Catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice, guarding themselves with the greatest care and diligence against the poisonous infection of such security or vanity. Let them continue to read and teach, to learn and meditate and ponder. Let them never stop until they have proved by experience that they have taught the devil to death and have become wiser than God himself and all his saints.

²⁰ If they show such diligence, then I promise them — and their experience will bear me out — that they will gain much fruit and God will make excellent men of them. Then in due time they themselves

will make the noble confession that the longer they work with the Catechism, the less they know of it and the more they have to learn. Only then, hungry and thirsty, will they truly relish what now they cannot bear to smell because they are so bloated and surfeited. To this end may God grant his grace!
Amen.^(tr-575)

PREFACE¹

¹ This sermon has been undertaken for the instruction of children and uneducated people. Hence from ancient times it has been called in Greek, a “catechism” — that is, instruction for children. ² Its contents represent the minimum of knowledge required of a Christian. Whoever does not possess it should not be reckoned among Christians nor admitted to a sacrament,² just as a craftsman who does not know the rules and practices of his craft is rejected and considered incompetent. ³ For this reason young people should be thoroughly instructed in the various parts of the Catechism or children’s sermons and diligently drilled in their practice.

⁴ Therefore, it is the duty of every head of a household to examine his children and servants at least once a week and ascertain what they have learned of it, and if they do not know it, to keep them faithfully at it. ⁵ I well remember the time when there were old people who were so ignorant that they knew nothing of these things — indeed, even now we find them daily — yet they come to Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar and exercise all the rights of Christians, although those who come to the sacrament ought to know more and have a fuller understanding of all Christian doctrine than children and beginners at school. ⁶ As for the common people, however, we should be satisfied if they learned the three parts³ which have been heritage of Christendom from ancient times, though they were rarely taught and treated correctly, so that all who wish to be Christians in fact as well as in name, both young and old, may be well-trained in them and familiar with them.

I. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

- ¹ 1. You shall have no other gods before me.
- ² 2. You shall not take the name of God in vain.
- ³ 3. You shall keep the Sabbath day holy.
- ⁴ 4. You shall honor father and mother.
- ⁵ 5. You shall not kill.
- ⁶ 6. You shall not commit adultery.
- ⁷ 7. You shall not steal.
- ⁸ 8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.^(tr-577)
- ⁹ 9. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.
- ¹⁰ 10. You shall not covet his wife, man-servant, maid-servant, cattle, or anything that is his.⁴

II. THE CHIEF ARTICLES OF OUR FAITH

¹¹ I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth:

¹² And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: he descended into hell, the third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, the Father almighty, whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

¹³ I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church,⁵ the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

III. THE PRAYER, OR OUR FATHER, WHICH CHRIST TAUGHT

¹⁴ Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.⁶

¹⁵ These are the most necessary parts of Christian instruction. We should learn to repeat them word for word. ¹⁶ Our children should be taught the habit of reciting them daily when they rise in the morning, when they go to their meals, and they go to bed at night; until they repeat them they should not be given anything to eat or drink. ¹⁷ Every father has the same duty to his household; he should dismiss man-servants and maid-servants if they do not know these things and are unwilling to learn them. ¹⁸ Under no circumstances should a person be tolerated if he is so rude and unruly that he refuses to learn these three parts in which everything contained in Scripture is comprehended in short, plain, and ^(tr-579) simple terms, ¹⁹ for the dear fathers or apostles, whoever they were,⁷ have thus summed up the doctrine, life, wisdom, and learning which constitute the Christian's conversation, conduct and concern.

²⁰ When these three parts are understood, we ought also to know what to say about the sacraments which Christ himself instituted. Baptism and the holy Body and Blood of Christ, according to the texts of Matthew and Mark at the end of their Gospels where they describe how Christ said farewell to his disciples and sent them forth.

BAPTISM

“Go and teach all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

²² It is enough for an ordinary person to know this much about Baptism from the Scriptures. The other sacrament may be dealt with similarly, in short, simple words according to the text of St. Paul.

THE SACRAMENT [OF THE ALTAR]

“Our Lord Jesus Christ on the night when he was betrayed took bread, gave thanks, and broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat, this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’

“In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (1 Cor. 11:23-25).

²⁴ Thus we have, in all, five parts covering the whole of Christian doctrine, which we should constantly teach and require young people to recite word for word. Do not assume that they will learn and retain this teaching from sermons alone. ²⁵ When these parts have been well learned, you may assign them also some Psalms and some hymns,⁸ based on these subjects, to supplement and confirm their knowledge. Thus our youth will be led into the Scriptures so they make progress daily.

²⁶ However, it is not enough for them simply to learn and repeat these parts verbatim. The young people should also attend preaching, especially at the time designated for the Catechism,⁹ so that they may hear it explained and may learn the meaning of ^(tr-581) every part. Then they will also be able to repeat what they have heard and give a good, correct answer when they are questioned, and thus the preaching will not be without benefit and fruit. ²⁷ The reason we take such care to preach on the Catechism frequently is to impress it upon our youth, not in a lofty and learned manner but briefly and very simply, so that it may penetrate deeply into their minds and remain fixed in their memories. ²⁸ Now we shall take up the above-mentioned parts one by one and in the plainest possible manner say about them as much as is necessary.

[FIRST PART:] THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

“You shall have no other gods.”

¹ That is, you shall regard me alone as your God. What does this mean, and how is it to be understood? What is to have a god? What is God?

² Answer: A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. ³ If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.

⁴ The purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, and these fly straight to the one true God and cling to him alone. The meaning is: “See to it that you let me alone be your God, and never seek another.” In other words: “Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, come and cling to me. I am the one who will satisfy you and help you out of every need. Only let your heart cling to no one else.”

⁵ This I must explain a little more plainly, so that it may be understood and remembered, by citing some common examples of failure to observe this commandment. Many a person thinks he has God and everything he needs when he has money and property; in them he trusts and of them he boasts so stubbornly and securely that he cares for no one. ⁶ Surely such a man also has a god — mammon¹ by name, that is, money and possessions ^(tr-583) — on which he fixes his whole heart. It is the most common idol on earth. ⁷ He who has money and property feels secure, happy, fearless, as if he were sitting in the midst of paradise. ⁸ On the other hand, he who has nothing doubts and despairs as if he never heard of God. ⁹ Very few there are who are cheerful, who do not fret and complain, if they do not have mammon. This desire for wealth clings and cleaves to our nature all the way to the grave.

¹⁰ So, too, if anyone boasts of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, and honor, and trusts in them, he also has a god, but not the one, true God. Notice, again, how presumptuous, secure, and proud people become because of such possessions, and how despondent when they lack them or are deprived of them. Therefore, I repeat, to have a God properly means to have something in which the heart trusts completely.

¹¹ Again, consider what we used to do in our blindness under the papacy. If anyone had a toothache, he fasted to the honor of St. Apollonia; if he feared fire, he sought St. Lawrence as his patron; if he feared the plague, he made a vow to St. Sebastian or Roch.² There were countless other

such abominations, and every person selected his own saint and worshiped and invoked him in time of need. ¹² In this class belong those who go so far as to make a pact with the devil in order that he may give them plenty of money, help them in love affairs, protect their cattle, recover lost possessions, etc., as magicians and sorcerers do. All these fix their heart and trust elsewhere than in the true God. They neither expect nor seek anything from him.

¹³ Thus you can easily understand the nature and scope of this commandment. It requires that man's whole heart and confidence be placed in God alone, and in no one else. To have God, you see, does not mean to lay hands upon him, or put him into a purse, or shut him up in a chest. ¹⁴ We lay hold of him when our heart embraces him and clings to him. ¹⁵ To cling to him with all our heart is nothing else than to entrust ourselves to him completely. He wishes to turn us away from everything else, and draw us to himself, because he is the one eternal good. It is as if he said: "What you formerly sought from the saints, or what you hoped to receive from ^(tr-585) mammon or anything else, turn to me for all this; look upon me as the one who wishes to help you and to lavish all good upon you richly."

¹⁶ Behold, here you have the true honor and the true worship which please God and which he commands under penalty of eternal wrath, namely, that the heart should know no other consolation or confidence than that in him, nor let itself be torn from him, but for him should risk and disregard everything else on earth. ¹⁷ On the other hand, you can easily judge how the world practices nothing but false worship and idolatry. There has never been a people so wicked that it did not establish and maintain some sort of worship. Everyone has set up a god of his own, to which he looked for blessings, help, and comfort.

¹⁸ For example, the heathen who put their trust in power and dominion exalted Jupiter as their supreme god. Others who strove for riches, happiness, pleasure, and a life of ease venerated Hercules, Mercury, Venus, or others, while pregnant women worshiped Diana or Lucina,³ and so forth. Everyone made into a god that to which his heart was inclined. Even in the mind of all the heathen, therefore, to have a god means to trust and believe. ¹⁹ The trouble is that their trust is false and wrong, for it is not founded upon the one God, apart from whom there is truly no god in heaven or on earth. ²⁰ Accordingly the heathen actually fashion their fancies and dreams about God into an idol and entrust themselves to an empty nothing. ²¹ So it is with all idolatry. Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it. It is primarily in the heart, which pursues other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils. It neither cares for God nor expects good things from him sufficiently to trust that he wants to help, nor does it believe that whatever good it receives comes from God.

²² There is, moreover, another false worship. This is the greatest idolatry that has been practiced up to now, and it is still prevalent in the world. Upon it all the religious orders are founded. It concerns only that conscience which seeks help, comfort, and salvation in its own works and presumes to wrest heaven from God. It keeps account how often it has made endowments, fasted, celebrated Mass, etc. On such things it relies and of them it boasts, unwilling to receive anything as a gift from God, but desiring by itself to earn or merit everything by works of supererogation, just as if God were in our service or debt and we were his liege lords. ²³ What is this but making God into an idol — indeed, an "apple-god"⁴ — ^(tr-587) and setting up ourselves as God? This reasoning, however, is a little too subtle to be understood by young pupils.

²⁴ This much, however, should be said to ordinary people so that they may mark well and remember the meaning of this commandment: We are to trust in God alone and turn to him, expecting from him only good things; for it is he who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all temporal and eternal blessings. It is he who protects us from evil, he who saves and delivers us when any evil befalls. It is God alone, I have often enough repeated, from whom

we receive all that is good and by whom we are delivered from all evil. ²⁵ This, I think, is why we Germans from ancient times have called God by a name more elegant and worthy than any found in other languages, a name derived from the word “good”⁵ because he is an eternal fountain which overflows with sheer goodness and pours forth all that is good in name and in fact.

²⁶ Although much that is good comes to us from men, we receive it all from God through his command and ordinance. Our parents and all authorities — in short, all people placed in the position of neighbors — have received the command to do us all kinds of good. So we receive our blessings not from them, but from God through them. Creatures are only the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings. For example, he gives to the mother breasts and milk for her infant, and he gives grain and all kinds of fruits from the earth for man’s nourishment — things which no creature could produce by himself. ²⁷ No one, therefore, should presume to take or give anything except as God has commanded it. We must acknowledge everything as God’s gifts and thank him for them, as this commandment requires. Therefore, this way of receiving good through God’s creatures is not to be disdained, nor are we arrogantly to seek other ways and means than God has commanded, for that would be not receiving our blessings from God but seeking them from ourselves.

²⁸ Let everyone, then, take care to magnify and exalt this commandment above all things and not make light of it. Search and examine your own heart thoroughly and you will find whether or not it clings to God alone. Do you have the kind of heart that expects from him nothing but good, especially in distress and want, and renounces and forsakes all that is not God? Then you have the one true God. On the contrary, does your heart cling to something else, from which it hopes to receive more good and help than from God, and does it flee not to him but from him when things go wrong? Then you have an idol, another god.

^(tr-589) ²⁹ Consequently, in order to show that God will not have this commandment taken lightly but will strictly watch over it, he has attached to it, first, a terrible threat and, then, a beautiful, comforting promise. These should be thoroughly stressed and impressed upon young people so that they may take them to heart and remember them.

[EXPLANATION OF THE APPENDIX TO THE FIRST COMMANDMENT]⁶

³⁰ *“For I am the Lord your God, mighty and jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing mercy to many thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”⁷*

³¹ Although these words apply to all the commandments (as we shall hear later),⁸ yet they are attached precisely to this one which stands at the head of the list because it is of the utmost importance for a man to have the right head. For where the head is right, the whole life must be right, and vice versa. ³² Learn from these words, then, how angry God is with those who rely on anything but himself, and again, how kind and gracious he is to those who trust and believe him alone with their whole heart. His wrath does not abate until the fourth generation. ³³ On the other hand, his kindness and goodness extend to many thousands, lest men live in security and commit themselves to luck, like brutes who think that it makes no great difference how they live. ³⁴ He is a God who takes vengeance upon men who turn away from him, and his anger continues to the fourth generation, until they are utterly exterminated. Therefore he wills to be feared and not to be despised.

³⁵ This he has witnessed in all the records of history, as Scripture amply shows and as daily experience can still teach us. From the beginning he has completely rooted out all idolatry, and on that account he has destroyed both heathen and Jews; just so in our day he overthrows all false worship so that all who persist in it must ultimately perish. ³⁶ Even now there are proud, powerful, and rich pot-

bellies who, not caring whether God frowns or smiles, boast defiantly of their mammon and believe that they can withstand his wrath. But they will not succeed. Before they know it they will be wrecked, along with all they have trusted in, just as all others have perished who thought themselves to be so high and mighty.

³⁷ Just because such blockheads imagine, when God refrains from ^(tr-591) disturbing their security, that he is unconcerned or uninterested in such matters, he must strike and punish them so severely that he will not forget his anger down to their children's children. He intends that everyone shall be impressed and see that this is no laughing matter with him. ³⁸ These are also the people he means when he says, "who hate me," that is, those who persist in their stubbornness and pride. They refuse to hear what is preached or spoken to them. When they are rebuked, to bring them to their senses and cause them to mend their ways before punishment descends, they become so mad and foolish that they justly merit the wrath they receive. We observe this every day in the case of bishops and princes.

³⁹ Terrible as these threats are, much mightier is the comfort in the promise that assures mercy to those who cling to God alone — sheer goodness and blessing, not only for themselves but also for their children to a thousand and even many thousands of generations. ⁴⁰ Certainly, if we desire all good things in time and eternity, this ought to move and impel us to fix our hearts upon God with perfect confidence since the divine Majesty comes to us with so gracious an offer, so cordial an invitation, and so rich a promise.

⁴¹ Therefore let everyone be careful not to regard this as if it were spoken by man. For it brings you either eternal blessing, happiness, and salvation, or eternal wrath, misery, and woe. What more could you ask or desire than God's gracious promise that he will be yours with every blessing and will protect and help you in every need? ⁴² The trouble is that the world does not believe this at all, and does not recognize it as God's Word. For the world sees that those who trust God and not mammon suffer grief and want and are opposed and attacked by the devil. They have neither money, prestige, nor honor, and can scarcely even keep alive; meanwhile, those who serve mammon have power, prestige, honor, wealth, and every comfort in the eyes of the world. Accordingly, we must grasp these words, even in the face of this apparent contradiction, and learn that they neither lie nor deceive but will yet prove to be true.

⁴³ Reflect on the past, search it out, and tell me, When men have devoted all their care and diligence to scraping together great wealth and money, what have they gained in the end? You will find that they have wasted their effort and toil or, if they have amassed great treasures, that these have ^(tr-593) turned to dust and vanished. They themselves have never found happiness in their wealth, nor has it ever lasted to the third generation. ⁹ ⁴⁴ Examples of this you will find aplenty in all histories and in the recollections of elderly and experienced people. Just ponder and heed them. ⁴⁵ Saul was a great king, chosen by God, and an upright man; but once he was secure on his throne and he let his heart depart from God, placing his confidence in his crown and power, he inevitably perished with all that he had; not one of his children remained. ¹ ⁴⁶ David, on the other hand, was a poor, despised man, hunted down and persecuted, his life nowhere secure, yet inevitably he remained safe from Saul and became king. ² These words must stand and prove to be true since God cannot lie or deceive; just leave it to the devil and the world to deceive you with their appearance, which indeed endures for a time but in the end is nothing! ³

⁴⁷ Let us therefore learn the first commandment well and realize that God will tolerate no presumption and no trust in any other object; he makes no greater demand of us than a hearty trust in him for all blessings. Then we shall be on the right path and walk straight ahead, using all of God's gifts exactly as a cobbler uses his needle, awl, and thread (for work, eventually to lay them aside) or as

a traveler avails himself of an inn, food, and bed (only for his temporal need). Let each person be in his station in life according to God's order, allowing none of these good things to be his lord or idol.

⁴⁸ Let this suffice for the First Commandment. We had to explain it at length since it is the most important. For, as I said before,⁴ where the heart is right with God and this commandment is kept, fulfillment of all the others will follow of its own accord.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

⁴⁹ *"You shall not take the name of God in vain."*

⁵⁰ As the First Commandment has inwardly instructed the heart and taught faith, so this commandment leads us outward and directs the lips and the tongue into the right relation to God. The first things that issue and emerge from the heart are words. As I have taught above how to answer the question, What it is to have a God, so you must learn ^(tr-595) to grasp simply the meaning of this and all the other commandments and apply them to yourself.

⁵¹ If you are asked, "How do you understand the Second Commandment? What does it mean to misuse or take the name of God in vain?" you should answer briefly: "It is a misuse of God's name if we call upon the Lord God in any way whatsoever to support falsehood or wrong of any kind." Therefore what this commandment forbids is appealing to God's name falsely or taking his name upon our lips when our heart knows or should know that the facts are otherwise — for example, where men take oaths in court and one side lies against the other.⁵² God's name cannot be more grievously abused than for purposes of falsehood and deceit. Let this stand as the plain and simple meaning of this commandment.

⁵³ From this everyone can readily infer when and in how many ways God's name is abused, though it is impossible to enumerate all its misuses. To discuss it briefly, misuse of the divine name occurs most obviously in worldly business and in matters involving money, property, and honor, whether publicly in court or in the market or elsewhere, when a person perjures himself, swearing by God's name or by his own soul. This is especially common in marriage matters when two persons secretly betroth themselves to each other and afterward deny it under oath.

⁵⁴ The greatest abuse, however, occurs in spiritual matters, which pertain to the conscience, when false preachers arise and peddle their lying nonsense as the Word of God.

⁵⁵ See, all this is an attempt to embellish yourself with God's name or to put up a good front and justify yourself, whether in ordinary worldly affairs or in sublime and difficult matters of faith and doctrine. Also to be counted among liars are blasphemers, not only the very crass ones who are well known to everyone and who disgrace God's name unabashedly (these belong in the hangman's school, not ours), but also those who publicly slander the truth and God's Word and consign it to the devil. Of this there is no need to speak further.

⁵⁶ Let us take to heart how important this commandment is and diligently shun and avoid every misuse of the holy name as the greatest sin that can be committed outwardly. For to lie and deceive is in itself a gross sin, but it is greatly aggravated when we attempt to justify and confirm ^(tr-597) it by invoking God's name and using it as a cloak to cover our shame. So from a single lie a double one results — indeed, manifold lies.

⁵⁷ Therefore God has attached to this commandment a solemn threat: "for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." This means that in no one shall a violation be condoned or left unpunished. As little as God will permit the heart that turns away from him to go unpunished, so little will he permit his name to be used to gloss over a lie.⁵⁸ Unfortunately it is now a common

calamity all over the world that there are few who do not use the name of God for lies and all kinds of wickedness, just as there are few who trust in God with their whole heart.

⁵⁹ By nature we all have this beautiful virtue that whenever we commit a wrong we like to cover and gloss over our disgrace so that no one may see it or know it. Nor man is so arrogant as to boast before the whole world of the wickedness he has committed. We prefer to act in secret without anyone's being aware of it. Then if anyone is denounced, God and his name have to be dragged in to turn the villainy into righteousness and the disgrace into honor. ⁶⁰ This is the common course of the world. Like a great deluge, it has flooded all lands. Hence we get what we deserve: plague, war, famine, fire, flood, wayward wives and children and servants, and troubles of every kind. Where else could so much misery come from? It is a great mercy that the earth still bears and sustains us.

⁶¹ Above all things, therefore, our young people should be strictly required and trained to hold this as well as the other commandments in high regard. Whenever they transgress, we must be after them at once with the rod, confront them with the commandment, and continually impress it upon them, so that they may be brought up not merely with punishment but in the reverence and fear of God.

⁶² Now you understand what it means to take God's name in vain. To repeat very briefly, it is either simply to lie and assert under his name something that is not so, or to curse, swear, conjure, and, in short, to practice wickedness of any sort.

⁶³ In addition, you must also know how to use the name of God aright. With the words, ^(tr-599) "You shall not take the name of God in vain," God at the same time gives us to understand that we are to use his name properly, for it has been revealed and given to us precisely for our use and benefit. ⁶⁴ Since we are forbidden here to use the holy name in support of falsehood or wickedness, it follows, conversely that we are commanded to use it in the service of truth and all that is good — for example, when we swear properly where it is necessary and required. So, also, when we teach properly; again, when we call on his name in time of need, or praise and thank him in time of prosperity, etc. All this is summarized in the command in [Ps. 50:15](#), "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you and you shall glorify me." All this is what we mean by calling upon his name in service of truth and using it devoutly. Thus his name is hallowed, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer.

⁶⁵ Here you have the substance of the entire commandment explained. If it is so understood, you have easily solved the question that has tormented so many teachers: ⁵ why swearing is forbidden in the Gospel, ⁶ and yet Christ, St. Paul, ⁷ and other saints took oaths. ⁶⁶ The explanation is briefly this: We are not to swear in support of evil (that is, to a falsehood) or unnecessarily; but in support of the good and for the advantage of our neighbor we are to swear. This is a truly good work by which God is praised, truth and justice are established, falsehood is refuted, people are reconciled, obedience is rendered, and quarrels are settled. For here God himself intervenes and separates right from wrong, good from evil. ⁶⁷ If one party in a dispute swears falsely, he will not escape punishment. Though it may take a long time, nothing he does will in the end succeed; everything he may gain by the false oath will slip through his fingers and will never be enjoyed. ⁶⁸ This I have seen in the case of many who broke their promise of marriage; they never enjoyed a happy hour or a healthful day thereafter, and thus they miserably perished, body, soul, and possessions.

⁶⁹ Therefore I advise and urge, as I have before, that by means of warning and threat, restraint and punishment, children be trained in due time to shun falsehood and especially to avoid calling upon God's name in its support. Where they are allowed to do as they please, no good will come of it. It is evident that the world today is more wicked than it has ever been. There is no government, no obedience, no fidelity, no faith ^(tr-601) — only perverse, unbridled men whom no teaching or punishment can help. All this is God's wrath and punishment upon such willful contempt of this commandment.

⁷⁰ On the other hand, children should be constantly urged and encouraged to honor God's name and keep it constantly upon their lips in all circumstances and experiences, for true honor to God's name consists of looking to it for all consolation and therefore calling upon it. Thus, as we have heard above, the heart by faith first gives God the honor due him and then the lips do so by confession.

⁷¹ This is a blessed and useful habit, and very effective against the devil, who is ever around us, lying in wait to lure us into sin and shame, calamity and trouble. He hates to hear God's name and cannot long remain when it is uttered and invoked from the heart. ⁷² Many a terrible and shocking calamity would befall us if God did not preserve us through our calling upon his name. I have tried it myself and learned by experience that often sudden, great calamity was averted and vanished in the very moment I called upon God. To defy the devil, I say, we should always keep the holy name on our lips so that he may not be able to injure us as he is eager to do.

⁷³ For this purpose it also helps to form the habit of commending ourselves each day to God — our soul and body, wife, children, servants, and all that we have — for his protection against every conceivable need. Thus has originated and continued among us the custom of saying grace and returning thanks at meals and saying other prayers for both morning and evening. ⁸ ⁷⁴ From the same source came the custom of children who cross themselves when they see or hear anything monstrous or fearful and exclaim, "Lord God, save us!" "Help, dear Lord Christ!" etc. Thus, too, if anyone meets with unexpected good fortune, however trivial, he may say, "God be praised and thanked!" "This God has bestowed upon me!" etc. Children used to be trained to fast and pray to St. Nicholas and other saints, but the other practices would be more pleasing and acceptable to God than any monastic life and Carthusian holiness. ⁹

⁷⁵ With childish and playful methods like these we may bring up our youth in the fear and honor of God so that the First and Second commandments may become familiar and be constantly practiced. Then some good may take root, spring up, and bear fruit, and men may grow up of whom an entire land may be proud. ⁷⁶ This would be the right way to bring up children, so long as they ^(tr-603) can be trained with kind and pleasant methods, for those who have to be forced by means of rods and blows will come to no good end; at best they will remain good only as long as the rod is on their backs.

⁷⁷ This kind of training takes such root in their hearts that they fear God more than they do rods and clubs. This I say plainly for the sake of the young, so that it may sink into their minds, for when we preach to children, we must also speak their language. Thus we have averted the misuse of the divine name and taught that its right use consists not only of words but also of practice and life. We want them to know that God is well pleased with the right use of his name and will as richly reward it, even as he will terribly punish its misuse.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

⁷⁸ *"You shall sanctify the holy day."*

⁷⁹ Our word "holy day" or "holiday" is so called from the Hebrew word "Sabbath," which properly means to rest, that is, to cease from labor; hence our common expression for "stopping work" literally means "observing a holy day or holiday."¹ ⁸⁰ In the Old Testament God set apart the seventh day and appointed it for rest and he commanded it to be kept holy above all other days.² As far as outward observance is concerned, the commandment was given to the Jews alone. They were to abstain from hard work and to rest, so that both man and beast might be refreshed and not be exhausted by constant labor. ⁸¹ In time, however, the Jews interpreted this commandment too narrowly and grossly misused it. They slandered Christ and would not permit him to do what they themselves were in the habit of doing on that day, as we read in the Gospel³ — as if the commandment could be fulfilled by refraining

from manual labor of any kind. This was not its intention, but, as we shall hear, it meant that we should sanctify the holy day or day of rest.

⁸² Therefore, according to its literal, outward sense, this commandment does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely external matter, like the other ordinances of the Old Testament connected with particular customs, persons, times, and places,⁴ from all of which we are now set free through Christ.⁵

⁸³ To offer ordinary people a Christian interpretation of what God requires in this commandment, we point out that we keep holy days not for the sake of intelligent and well informed Christians, for these have no need of them. We keep them, first, for the sake of bodily need. Nature teaches and demands that the common people — man-servants and maid-servants who have attended to their work and trades the whole week long — should retire for a day to rest and be refreshed. ^(tr-605) ⁸⁴ Secondly and most especially, we keep holy days so that people may have time and opportunity, which otherwise would not be available, to participate in public worship, that is, that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then praise God with song and prayer.

⁸⁵ This, I say, is not restricted to a particular time, as it was among the Jews, when it had to be precisely this or that day, for in itself no one day is better than another. Actually, there should be worship daily; however, since this is more than the common people can do, at least one day in the week must be set apart for it. Since from ancient times Sunday has been appointed for this purpose, we should not change it. In this way a common order will prevail and no one will create disorder by unnecessary innovation.

⁸⁶ This, then, is the plain meaning of this commandment: Since we observe holidays anyhow, we should devote their observance to learning God's Word. The special office of this day, therefore, should be the ministry of the Word for the sake of the young and the poor common people. However, the observance of rest should not be so narrow as to forbid incidental and unavoidable work.

⁸⁷ Accordingly, when you are asked what "You shall sanctify the holy day" means, answer: "It means to keep it holy." What is meant by "keeping it holy"? Nothing else than to devote it to holy words, holy works, holy life. In itself the day needs no sanctification, for it was created holy. But God wants it to be holy to you. So it becomes holy or unholy on your account, according as you spend the day in doing holy or unholy things.

⁸⁸ How does this sanctifying take place? Not when we sit behind the stove and refrain from external work, or deck ourselves with garlands and dress up in our best clothes, but, as has been said, when we occupy ourselves with God's Word and exercise ourselves in it.

⁸⁹ Indeed, we Christians should make every day a holy day and give ourselves only to holy activities — that is, occupy ourselves daily with God's Word and carry it in our hearts and on our lips. However, as we have said, since all people do not have this much time and leisure, we must set apart several hours a week for the young, and at least a day for the whole community, when we can concentrate upon such matters and deal especially with the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. Thus we may regulate our whole life and being according to God's Word. ⁹⁰ Wherever this practice is in force, a holy day is truly kept. ^(tr-607) Where it is not, it cannot be called a Christian holy day. Non-Christians can spend a day in rest and idleness, too, and so can the whole swarm of clerics in our day who stand daily in the churches, singing and ringing bells, without sanctifying the holy day because they neither preach nor practice God's Word but teach and live contrary to it.

⁹¹ The Word of God is the true holy thing⁶ above all holy things. Indeed, it is the only one we Christians acknowledge and have. Though we had the bones of all the saints or all the holy and consecrated vestments gathered together in one heap, they could not help us in the slightest degree, for they are all dead things that can sanctify no one. But God's Word is the treasure that sanctifies all

things. By it all the saints themselves have been sanctified.⁹² At whatever time God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or pondered, there the person, the day, and the work are sanctified by it, not on account of the external work but on account of the Word which makes us all saints. Accordingly, I constantly repeat that all our life and work must be guided by God's Word if they are to be God-pleasing or holy. Where that happens the commandment is in force and is fulfilled.

⁹³ Conversely, any conduct or work done apart from God's Word is unholy in the sight of God, no matter how splendid and brilliant it may appear, or even if it be altogether covered with holy relics, as are the so-called spiritual estates⁷ who do not know God's Word but seek holiness in their own works.

⁹⁴ Note, then, that the power and force of this commandment consist not of the resting but of the sanctifying, so that this day should have its own particular holy work. Other trades and occupations are not properly called holy work unless the doer himself is first holy. But here a work must be performed by which the doer himself is made holy; this, as we have heard, takes place only through God's Word. Places, times, persons, and the entire outward order of worship are therefore instituted and appointed in order that God's Word may exert its power publicly.

⁹⁵ Since so much depends on God's Word that no holy day is sanctified without it, we must realize that God insists upon a strict observance of this commandment and will punish all who despise his Word and refuse to hear and learn it, especially at the times appointed.

⁹⁶ Therefore this commandment is violated not only by those who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, like those who in their greed or frivolity neglect to hear God's Word or lie around in taverns dead drunk like swine, but also by that multitude of others ^(tr-609) who listen to God's Word as they would to any other entertainment, who only from force of habit go to hear preaching and depart again with as little knowledge of the Word at the end of the year as at the beginning.⁹⁷ It used to be thought that Sunday had been properly hallowed if one heard a Mass or the reading of the Gospel; no one asked about God's Word, and no one taught it either. Now that we have God's Word, we still fail to remove the abuse of the holy day, for we permit ourselves to be preached to and admonished but we listen without serious concern.

⁹⁸ Remember, then, that you must be concerned not only about hearing the Word but also about learning and retaining it. Do not regard it as an optional or unimportant matter. It is the commandment of God, and he will require of you an accounting of how you have heard and learned and honored his Word.

⁹⁹ In the same way those conceited fellows should be chastised who, after hearing a sermon or two, become sick and tired of it and feel that they know it all and need no more instruction. This is precisely the sin that used to be classed among the mortal sins and was called *acidia*⁸ — that is, indolence or satiety — a malignant, pernicious plague with which the devil bewitches and befuddles the hearts of many so that he may take us by surprise and stealthily take the Word of God away from us.

¹⁰⁰ Let me tell you this. Even though you know the Word perfectly and have already mastered everything, still you are daily under the dominion of the devil, who neither day nor night relaxes his effort to steal upon you unawares and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against all these commandments. Therefore you must continually keep God's Word in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, new pleasure, and a new spirit of devotion, and it constantly cleanses the heart and its meditations. For these words are not idle or dead, but effective and living.¹⁰² Even if no other interest or need drove us to the Word, yet everyone should be spurred on by the realization that in this way the

devil is cast out and put to flight, this commandment is fulfilled, and God is more pleased than by any work of hypocrisy, however brilliant.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

^(tr-611) ¹⁰³ Thus far we have learned the first three commandments, which are directed toward God. First, we should trust, fear, and love him with our whole heart all the days of our lives. Secondly, we should not misuse his holy name in support of lies or any evil purpose whatsoever, but use it for the praise of God and the benefit and salvation of our neighbor and ourselves. Thirdly, on holy days or days of rest we should diligently devote ourselves to God's Word so that all our conduct and life may be regulated by it. Now follow the other seven, which relate to our neighbor. Among these the first and greatest is:

¹⁰⁴ *"You shall honor your father and mother.*

¹⁰⁵ To fatherhood and motherhood God has given the special distinction, above all estates that are beneath it, that he commands us not simply to love our parents but also to honor them. With respect to brothers, sisters, and neighbors in general he commands nothing higher than that we love them. Thus he distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to himself.

¹⁰⁶ For it is a much greater thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love but also deference, humility, and modesty, directed (so to speak) toward a majesty hidden within them. ¹⁰⁷ It requires us not only to address them affectionately and reverently, but above all to show by our actions, both of heart and of body, that we respect them very highly and that next to God we give them the very highest place. For anyone whom we are whole-heartedly to honor, we must truly regard as high and great.

¹⁰⁸ Young people must therefore be taught to revere their parents as God's representatives, and to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric they may be, they are their own father and mother, given them by God. They are not to be deprived of their honor because of their ways or their failings. Therefore, we are not to think of their persons, whatever they are, but of the will of God, who has created and ordained them to be our parents. In other respects, indeed, we are all equal in the sight of God, but among ourselves there must be this sort of inequality and proper distinctions. God therefore commands you to be careful to obey me as your father and to acknowledge my authority.

¹⁰⁹ First, then, learn what this commandment requires concerning honor to parents. You are to esteem and prize them as the most precious treasure on earth. ¹¹⁰ In your words you are to behave respectfully toward them, and not address them discourteously, critically, and ^(tr-613) censoriously, but submit to them and hold your tongue, even if they go too far. ¹¹¹ You are also to honor them by your actions (that is, with your body and possessions), serving them, helping them, and caring for them when they are old, sick, feeble, or poor; all this you should do not only cheerfully, but with humility and reverence, as in God's sight. He who has the right attitude toward his parents will not allow them to suffer want or hunger, but will place them above himself and at his side and will share with them all he has to the best of his ability.

¹¹² In the second place, notice what a great, good, and holy work is here assigned to children. Alas, it is utterly despised and brushed aside, and no one recognizes it as God's command or as a holy, divine word and precept. For if we had regarded it as such, it would have been apparent to all that they who lived according to these words must also be holy men. Then there would have been no need to institute monasticism or "spiritual estates." Every child would have remained faithful to this commandment and would have been able to set his conscience right toward God, saying: "If I am to do good and holy works, I know of none better than to show all honor and obedience to my parents, since God himself has commanded it. ¹¹³ What God commands must be much nobler than anything we

ourselves may devise. And because there is no greater or better teacher to be found than God, there can also be no better teaching than his. Now, he amply teaches what we should do if we wish to perform truly good works, and by commanding them he shows that he is well pleased with them. So, if this is God's command, and it embodies his highest wisdom, then I shall never improve upon it."

¹¹⁴ In this way, you see, we should have had godly children, properly taught, and reared in true blessedness; they would have remained at home in obedience and service to their parents, and we should have had an object lesson in goodness and happiness. However, men did not feel obliged to set forth God's commandment in its full glory. They were able to ignore it and skip lightly over it, and so children could not lay it to heart; they simply gaped in astonishment at all the arrangements we have devised without ever asking God's approval.

¹¹⁵ For the love of God, therefore, let us at last teach our young people to banish all other things from sight and give first place to this commandment. If they wish to serve God with truly good works, they must do what is pleasing to their fathers and mothers, or to those who have parental authority over them. Every child who knows and does this has, in the first place, the great comfort of being able joyfully to boast in the face of all who are occupied with works of their own choice: "See, this ^(tr-615) work is well pleasing to my God in heaven; this I know for certain." ¹¹⁶ Let them all come forward and boast of their many great, laborious, and difficult works; we shall see whether they can produce a single work that is greater and nobler than obedience to father and mother, which God has appointed and commanded next to obedience to his own majesty. If God's Word and will are placed first and observed, nothing ought to be considered more important than the will and word of our parents, provided that these, too, are subordinated to obedience toward God and are not set into opposition to the preceding commandments.

¹¹⁷ You should rejoice heartily and thank God that he has chosen and fitted you to perform a task so precious and pleasing to him. Even though it seems very trivial and contemptible, make sure that you regard it as great and precious, not on account of your worthiness but because it has its place within that jewel and holy treasure, the Word and commandment of God. ¹¹⁸ O how great a price all the Carthusian monks and nuns⁹ would pay if in the exercise of their religion they could bring before God a single work done in accordance with his commandment and could say with a joyful heart in his presence, "Now I know that this work is well pleasing to Thee!" What will become of these poor wretched people when, standing before God and the whole world, they shall blush with shame before a little child that has lived according to this commandment and confess that with the merits of their whole lives they are not worthy to offer him a cup of water? ¹¹⁹ It serves them right for their devilish perversity in trampling God's commandment under foot that they must torture themselves in vain with their self-devised works¹ and meanwhile have only scorn and trouble for their reward.

¹²⁰ Should not the heart leap and melt with joy when it can go to work and do what is commanded, saying, "Lo, this is better than the holiness of all the Carthusians, even though they kill themselves with fasting and pray on their knees without ceasing"? Hence you have a sure text and a divine testimony that God has commanded this; concerning the other things he has commanded not a word. This is the plight and the miserable blindness of the world that no one believes this; so thoroughly has the devil bewitched us with the false holiness and glamor of our own works.

¹²¹ Therefore, I repeat, I should be very glad if we were to open our eyes and ears and take this to heart so that we may not again be led astray from the pure Word of God to the lying vanities of the devil. Then all would be well; parents would have more happiness, love, kindness, and harmony in their houses, and children would win their parents' hearts completely. ¹²² On the other hand, when they are obstinate and never do their duty until a rod is laid on their backs, they anger both God and ^(tr-617) their parents. Thus they deprive themselves of this treasure and joy of conscience and lay up for

themselves nothing but misfortune. ¹²³ That is the way things go in the world now, as everyone complains. But young and old are altogether wayward and unruly; they have no sense of modesty or honor; they do nothing until they are driven with blows; and they defame and depreciate one another behind their backs in any way they can. God therefore punishes them so that they sink into all kinds of trouble and misery. ¹²⁴ Neither can parents, as a rule, do very much; one fool trains another, and as they have lived, so live their children after them.

¹²⁵ This, I say, should be the first and strongest reason impelling us to keep this commandment. If we had no father and mother, we should wish, on account of the commandments, that God would set up a block or a stone which we might call father and mother. How much more, when he has given us living parents, should we be happy to show them honor and obedience. For we know that it is highly pleasing to the divine Majesty and all the angels, that it vexes all devils, and, besides, that it is the greatest work that we can do, next to the sublime worship of God described in the previous commandments. ¹²⁶ Even almsgiving and all other works for our neighbor are not equal to this. For God has exalted this estate of parents above all others; indeed, he has appointed it to be his representative on earth. This will and pleasure of God ought to provide us sufficient reason and incentive to do cheerfully and gladly whatever we can.

¹²⁷ Besides this, it is our duty before the world to show gratitude for the kindness and for all the good things we have received from our parents. ¹²⁸ But here again the devil rules in the world; children forget their parents, as we all forget God, and no one takes thought how God feeds, guards, and protects us and how many blessings of body and soul he bestows upon us. Especially when an evil hour comes do we rage and grumble impatiently and forget all the blessings we have received throughout our life. Just so we act toward our parents, and there is no child that recognizes and considers this, unless he is led to it by the Holy Spirit.

¹²⁹ The perversity of the world God knows very well. By means of commandments, therefore, he reminds and impels everyone to consider what his parents have done for him. Then everybody recognizes that he has received his body and life from them and that he has been nourished and nurtured by them when otherwise he would have perished ^(tr-619) a hundred times in his own filth. ¹³⁰ The wise men of old were right when they said, "God, parents, and teachers can never be sufficiently thanked and repaid."² He who views the matter in this light will, without compulsion, give all honor to his parents and esteem them as those through whom God has given him all blessings.

¹³¹ Over and above all this, another strong incentive for us to keep this commandment is that God has attached to it a lovely promise, "That you may have long life in the land where you dwell." ¹³² Here you see how important God considers this commandment. He declares that it is not only an object of pleasure and delight to himself, but also an instrument intended for our greatest welfare, to lead us to a quiet, pleasant, and blessed life. ¹³³ St. Paul also highly exalts and praises this commandment, saying in [Eph. 6:2, 3](#), "This is the first commandment with a promise: that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." Although the other commandments also have a promise implied, yet in none is it so plainly and explicitly stated.

¹³⁴ This, then, is the fruit and the reward, that whoever keeps this commandment will enjoy good days, happiness, and prosperity. On the other hand, the penalty for him who disobeys it is that he will perish sooner and never be happy in life. For, in the Scriptures, to have long life means not merely to grow old but to have everything that pertains to long life — health, wife and child, livelihood, peace, good government, etc., without which this life can neither be heartily enjoyed nor long endure. ¹³⁵ If you are unwilling to obey father and mother or to submit to them, then obey the hangman; and if you will not obey him, then obey the grim reaper,³ Death! ¹³⁶ This, in short, is the way God will have it:

render him obedience and love and service, and he will reward you abundantly with every blessing; on the other hand, if you provoke him to anger, he will send upon you both death and the hangman.

¹³⁷ Why do we have so many criminals who must daily be hanged, beheaded, or broken on the wheel if not because of disobedience? They will not allow themselves to be brought up in kindness; consequently, by the punishment of God they bring upon themselves the misfortune and grief that we behold, for it seldom happens that such wicked people die a natural and timely death.

^(tr-621) The godly and the obedient, however, are blessed. They live long in peace and quietness. They see their children's children, as we said above, "to the third and fourth generation."¹³⁸ Again, as we know from experience, where there are fine old families who prosper and have many children, it is certainly because some of them were brought up well and revered their parents. On the other hand, it is written of the wicked in **Ps. 109:13**, "May his posterity be cut off: and may their name be cut off in one generation."¹³⁹ Learn well, then, how important God considers obedience, since he so highly exalts it, so greatly delights in it, so richly rewards it, and besides is so strict about punishing those who transgress it.

¹⁴⁰ All this I say that it may be thoroughly impressed upon the young people, for no one will believe how necessary is this commandment, which in the past was neither heeded nor taught under the papacy. These are plain and simple words, and everyone thinks he already knows them well. So he passes over them lightly, fastens his attention on other things, and fails to perceive and believe how angry he makes God when he neglects this commandment, and how precious and acceptable a work he does when he observes it.

¹⁴¹ In connection with this commandment there is more to be said about the various kinds of obedience due to our superiors, persons whose duty it is to command and to govern. Out of the authority of parents all other authority is derived and developed. Where a father is unable by himself to bring up his child, he calls upon a schoolmaster to teach him; if he is too weak, he enlists the help of his friends and neighbors; if he passes away, he confers and delegates his authority and responsibility to others appointed for the purpose.¹⁴² Likewise he must have domestics (man-servants and maid-servants) under him to manage his household. Thus all who are called masters stand in the place of parents and derive from them their power and authority to govern. In the Scriptures they are all called fathers because in their responsibility they act in the capacity of fathers and ought to have fatherly hearts toward their people. So from ancient times the Romans and other peoples called the masters and mistresses of the household *patres et matres familias* (that is, house-fathers and house-mothers). Again, their princes and overlords were called *patres patriae*⁴ (that is, fathers of the country) to the great shame of us would-be Christians who do not speak of our rulers in the same way, or at least do not treat and honor them as such.

¹⁴³ What a child owes to father and mother, the entire household owes them likewise. Therefore man-servants and ^(tr-623) maid-servants should take care not only to obey their masters and mistresses, but also to honor them as their own parents and do everything that they know is expected of them, not from compulsion and reluctantly but gladly and cheerfully; and they should do it for the reason just mentioned, that it is God's commandment and is more pleasing to him than all other works.¹⁴⁴ They ought even to be willing to pay for the privilege of service and be glad to acquire masters and mistresses in order to have such joyful consciences and know how to do truly golden works. These works in the past have been neglected and despised; instead, everybody ran in the devil's name into monasteries, on pilgrimages, and after indulgences, to their own hurt and with a bad conscience.

¹⁴⁵ If this truth could be impressed upon the poor people, a servant girl would dance for joy and praise and thank God; and with her careful work, for which she receives sustenance and wages, she would gain a treasure such as all who pass for the greatest saints do not have. Is it not a wonderful

thing to be able to boast to yourself, “If I do my daily housework faithfully, that is better than the holiness and austere life of all the monks”? ¹⁴⁶ You have the promise, moreover, that you will prosper and fare well in everything. How can you lead a more blessed or holy life, as far as your works are concerned? ¹⁴⁷ In the sight of God it is really faith that makes a person holy; faith alone serves him, while our works serve the people. ¹⁴⁸ Here you have everything that is good — shelter and protection in the Lord and, what is more, a joyful conscience and a gracious God who will reward you a hundredfold. You are a true nobleman if you are upright and obedient. If you are not, you will have nothing but the wrath and displeasure of God; there will be no peace in your heart, and eventually you will have all kinds of trouble and misfortune.

¹⁴⁹ Whoever will not be moved by this, and who will not be inclined to godliness, we deliver to the hangman and the grim reaper. Therefore, let everyone who can take advice remember that God is not to be taken lightly. God speaks to you and demands obedience. If you obey him you are his dear child; if you despise this commandment, then take shame, misery, and grief for your reward.

¹⁵⁰ The same may be said of obedience to the civil government, which, as we have said, is to be classed with the estate of fatherhood, the most comprehensive of all relations. In this case a man is father not of a single family, but of as many people as he has inhabitants, citizens, or subjects. Through civil rulers, as through our own parents, God gives us food, house and ^(tr-625) home, protection and security. Therefore, since they bear this name and title with all honor as their chief glory, it is our duty to honor and magnify them as the most precious treasure and jewel on earth.

¹⁵¹ He who is obedient, willing, ready to serve, and cheerfully gives honor where it is due, knows that he pleases God and receives joy and happiness for his reward. On the other hand, if he will not do so in love, but despises or rebelliously resists authority, let him know that he shall have no favor or blessing from God. Where he counts on gaining a gulden⁵ by his unfaithfulness, he will lose ten elsewhere. Or he will fall victim to the hangman, or perish through war, pestilence, or famine, or his children will turn out badly; servants, neighbors, or strangers and tyrants will inflict injury, injustice, and violence upon him. What we seek and deserve, then, is paid back to us in retaliation.

¹⁵² If we ever let ourselves be persuaded that works of obedience are so pleasing to God and have so rich a reward, we shall be simply overwhelmed with our blessings and we shall have all that our hearts desire. But God’s Word and commandment are despised, as if they came from some loutish peddler. Let us see, though, whether you are the man to defy him. How difficult do you think it will be for him to pay you back? ¹⁵³ You will live much better with God’s favor, peace, and blessing than you will with disfavor and misfortune. ¹⁵⁴ Why, do you think, is the world now so full of unfaithfulness, shame, misery, and murder? It is because everyone wishes to be his own master, be free from all authority, care nothing for anyone, and do whatever he pleases. So God punishes one knave by means of another. When you defraud or despise your master, another person comes along and treats you likewise. Indeed, in your own household you must suffer ten times as much wrong from your own wife, children, or servants.

¹⁵⁵ Of course, we keenly feel our misfortune, and we grumble and complain of unfaithfulness, violence, and injustice; but we are unwilling to see that we ourselves are knaves who have roundly deserved punishment and that we are not one bit improved by it. We spurn favor and happiness; therefore, it is only fair that we have nothing but unhappiness without mercy. ¹⁵⁶ Somewhere on earth there must still be some godly people, or else God would not grant us so many blessings! If it depended on our merits, we would not have a penny⁶ in the house or a straw in the field. ¹⁵⁷ All this I have been obliged to set forth with such a profusion of words in the hope that someone ^(tr-627) may take it to heart, so that we may be delivered from the blindness and misery in which we are so deeply sunk

and may rightly understand the Word and will of God and sincerely accept it. From God's Word we could learn how to obtain an abundance of joy, happiness, and salvation, both here and in eternity.

¹⁵⁸ Thus we have three kinds of fathers presented in this commandment: fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of the nation. Besides these, there are also spiritual fathers — not like those in the papacy who applied this title to themselves but performed no fatherly office. For the name spiritual father belongs only to those who govern and guide us by the Word of God. ¹⁵⁹ St. Paul boasts that he is a father in **1 Cor. 4:15**, where he says, "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." ¹⁶⁰ Since such person are fathers, they are entitled to honor, even above all others. But they very seldom receive it, for the world's way of honoring them is to harry them out of the country and grudge them as much as a piece of bread. In short, as St. Paul says, they must be "the refuse of the world, and every man's offscouring."⁷

¹⁶¹ Yet there is need to impress upon the common people that they who would bear the name of Christians owe it to God to show "double honor"⁸ to those who watch over their souls and to treat them well and make provision for them. God will adequately recompense those who do so and will not let them suffer want. ¹⁶² But here everybody resists and rebels; all are afraid that their bellies will suffer, and therefore they cannot now support one good preacher although in the past they filled ten fat paunches. ¹⁶³ For this we deserve to have God deprive us of his Word and his blessings and once again allow preachers of lies⁹ to arise and lead us to the devil — and wring sweat and blood out of us besides.

¹⁶⁴ Those who keep their eyes on God's will and commandment, however, have the promise that they will be richly rewarded for all they contribute to their temporal and spiritual fathers, and for the honor they render them. Not only shall they have bread, clothing, and money for a year or two, but long life, sustenance, and peace, and afterwards abundance and blessedness forever. ¹⁶⁵ Do your duty, then, and leave it to God how he will support you and provide for all your wants. Since he has promised it, and has never yet lied, he will not lie to you either.

¹⁶⁶ This ought to encourage us and make our hearts so melt for joy and love toward those to whom we owe honor that we lift our hands in joyful ^(tr-629) thanks to God for giving us such promises. We ought to be willing to run to the ends of the world to obtain them. For the combined efforts of the whole world cannot add an hour to our life or raise from the earth a single grain of wheat for us. But God can and will give you everything abundantly, according to your heart's desire. He who despises and disdains this is not worthy to hear a word from God.

More than enough has now been said to those to whom this commandment applies.

¹⁶⁷ In addition, it would be well to preach to parents on the nature of their office, how they should treat those committed to their authority. Although the duty of superiors is not explicitly stated in the Ten Commandments, it is frequently dealt with in many other passages of Scripture, and God intends it to be included in this commandment in which he speaks of father and mother. ¹⁶⁸ God does not want to have knaves or tyrants in this office and responsibility; nor does he assign them this honor (that is, power and authority to govern) merely to receive homage. Parents should consider that they owe obedience to God, and that, above all, they should earnestly and faithfully discharge the duties of their office, not only to provide for the material support of their children, servants, subjects, etc., but especially to bring them up to the praise and honor of God. ¹⁶⁹ Therefore do not imagine that the parental office is a matter of your pleasure and whim. It is a strict commandment and injunction of God, who holds you accountable for it.

¹⁷⁰ The trouble is that no one perceives or heeds this. Everybody acts as if God gave us children for our pleasure and amusement, gave us servants merely to put them to work like cows or asses, and gave us subjects to treat them as we please, as if it were no concern of ours what they learn or how they live.

¹⁷¹ No one is willing to see that this is the command of the divine Majesty, who will solemnly call us to account and punish us for its neglect, nor is it recognized how very necessary it is to devote serious attention to the young. ¹⁷² If we want qualified and capable men for both civil and spiritual leadership, we must spare no effort, time, and expense in teaching and educating our children to serve God and mankind. We must not think only of amassing money and property for them. ¹⁷³ God can provide for them and make them rich without our help, as indeed he does daily. But he has given and entrusted children to us with the command that we train and govern them according to his will; otherwise God would have no need of father and mother. ¹⁷⁴ Therefore let everybody know that it is his chief duty, on pain of losing divine grace, to bring up his children in the fear and knowledge of ^(tr-631) God, and if they are gifted to give them opportunity to learn and study so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.

¹⁷⁵ If this were done, God would richly bless us and give us grace so that men might be trained who would be a benefit to the nation and the people. We would also have soundly instructed citizens, virtuous and home-loving wives who would faithfully bring up their children and servants to be godly. ¹⁷⁶ Think what deadly harm you do when you are negligent in this respect and fail to bring up your children to usefulness and piety. You bring upon yourself sin and wrath, thus earning hell by the way you have reared your own children, no matter how devout and holy you may be in other respects. ¹⁷⁷ Because this commandment is disregarded, God terribly punishes the world; hence there is no longer any civil order, peace, or respect for authority. We all complain about this state of things, but we do not see that it is our own fault. Because of the way we train them, we have unruly and disobedient subjects.

¹⁷⁸ This is enough to serve as a warning; a more extensive explanation will have to await another occasion.¹

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

¹⁷⁹ *“You shall not kill.”*

¹⁸⁰ We have now dealt with both the spiritual and the civil government, that is, divine and paternal authority and obedience. In this commandment we leave our own house and go out among our neighbors to learn how we should conduct ourselves individually toward our fellow men. Therefore neither God nor the government is included in this commandment, yet their right to take human life is not abrogated. ¹⁸¹ God has delegated his authority of punishing evil-doers to civil magistrates in place of parents; in early times, as we read in Moses,² parents had to bring their own children to judgment and sentence them to death. Therefore what is forbidden here applies to private individuals, not to governments.

¹⁸² This commandment is simple enough. We hear it explained every year in the Gospel, [Matthew 5](#),³ where Christ himself explains and summarizes it: We must not kill, either by hand, heart, or word, by signs or gestures, or by aiding and abetting. It forgives anger except, as we have said, to persons who occupy the place of God, that is, parents and rulers. Anger, reproof, and punishment are the prerogatives of God and his representatives, and they are to be exercised upon those who transgress this and the other commandments.

¹⁸³ The occasion and need for this commandment is that, as God well knows, the world ^(tr-633) is evil and this life is full of misery. He has therefore placed this and the other commandments as a boundary between good and evil. There are many offenses against this commandment, as there are against all the others. We must live among many people who do us harm, and so we have reason to be at enmity with

them. ¹⁸⁴ For instance, a neighbor, envious that you have received from God a better house and estate or greater wealth and good fortune than he, gives vent to his irritation and envy by speaking ill of you.

Thus by the devil's prompting you acquire many enemies who begrudge you even the least good, whether physical or spiritual. When we see such people, our hearts in turn rage and we are ready to shed blood and take revenge. Then follow cursing and blows, and eventually calamity and murder. ¹⁸⁵ Here God, like a kind father, steps in and intervenes to get the quarrel settled for the safety of all concerned. Briefly, he wishes to have all people defended, delivered, and protected from the wickedness and violence of others, and he has set up this commandment as a wall, fortress, and refuge about our neighbor so that no one may do him bodily harm or injury.

¹⁸⁶ What this commandment teaches, then, is that no one should harm another for any evil deed, no matter how much he deserves it. Not only is murder forbidden, but also everything that may lead to murder. Many persons, though they may not actually commit murder, nevertheless call down curses and imprecations upon their enemy's head, which, if they came true, would soon put an end to him. ¹⁸⁷ This spirit of revenge clings to every one of us, and it is common knowledge that no one willingly suffers injury from another. Therefore God wishes to remove the root and source of this bitterness toward our neighbor. He wants us to keep this commandment ever before our eyes as a mirror in which to see ourselves, so that we may be attentive to his will and with hearty confidence and prayer commit to him whatever wrong we suffer. Then we shall be content to let our enemies rave and rage and do their worst. Thus we may learn to calm our anger and have a patient, gentle heart, especially toward those who have given us occasion for anger, namely, our enemies.

¹⁸⁸ Briefly, then, to impress it unmistakably upon the common people, the import of the commandment against killing is this: In the first place, we should not harm anyone. This means, first, by hand or by deed; next, we should not use our tongue to advocate or advise harming anyone; again, ^(tr-635) we should neither use nor sanction any means or methods whereby anyone may be harmed; finally, our heart should harbor no hostility or malice toward anyone in a spirit of anger and hatred. Thus you should be blameless toward all people in body and soul, especially toward him who wishes or does you evil. For to do evil to somebody who desires and does you good is not human but devilish.

¹⁸⁹ In the second place, this commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor, or, though he has the opportunity, fails to prevent, protect, and save him from suffering bodily harm or injury. ¹⁹⁰ If you send a person away naked when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed him, you have let him starve. Likewise, if you see anyone condemned⁴ to death or in similar peril and do not save him although you know ways and means to do so, you have killed him. It will do you no good to plead that you did not contribute to his death by word or deed, for you have withheld your love from him and robbed him of the service by which his life might have been saved.

¹⁹¹ Therefore God rightly calls all persons murderers who do not offer counsel and aid to men in need and in peril of body and life. He will pass a most terrible sentence upon them in the day of judgment, as Christ himself declares. He will say: "I was hungry and thirsty and you gave me no food or drink, I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me, I was naked and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me."⁵ That is to say, "You would have permitted me and my followers to die of hunger, thirst, and cold, to be torn to pieces by wild beasts, to rot in prison or perish from want."

¹⁹² What else is this but to reproach such persons as murderers and bloodhounds? For although you have not actually committed all these crimes, as far as you were concerned you have nevertheless permitted your neighbor to languish and perish in his misfortune.

It is just as if I saw someone wearily struggling in deep water, or fallen into a fire, and could extend him my hand to pull him out and save him, and yet I did not do it. How would I appear before all the world in any other light than as a murderer and a scoundrel?

¹⁹³ Therefore it is God's real intention that we should allow no man to suffer harm, but show to everyone all kindness and love. ¹⁹⁴ And this kindness is directed, as I said, especially toward our enemies. To show kindness to our friends is but an ordinary heathen virtue, as Christ says in [Matthew 5:46, 47](#).

^(tr-637) ¹⁹⁵ Here again we have God's Word by which he wants to encourage and urge us to true, noble, exalted deeds, such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness toward our enemies. He always wants to remind us to think back to the First Commandment, that he is our God; that is, he wishes to help and protect us, so that he may subdue our desire for revenge.

¹⁹⁶ If this could be thoroughly impressed on people's minds, we would have our hands full of good works to do. ¹⁹⁷ But this would be no preaching for monks. It would too greatly undermine the "spiritual estate" and infringe upon the holiness of the Carthusians. It would be practically the same as forbidding their good works and emptying the monasteries. For in this teaching the ordinary Christian life would be considered just as acceptable, and even more so. Everybody would see how the monks mock and mislead the world with a false, hypocritical show of holiness, while they have thrown this and the other commandments to the winds, regarding them as unnecessary, as if they were not commandments but mere counsels. ⁶ Moreover, they have shamelessly boasted and bragged of their hypocritical calling and works as "the most perfect life," so that they might live a nice, soft life without the cross and suffering. This is why they fled to the monasteries, so that they might not have to suffer wrong from anyone or do anyone any good. ¹⁹⁸ Know, however, that it is the works commanded by God's Word which are the true, holy, and divine works in which he rejoices with all the angels. In contrast to them all human holiness is only stench and filth, and it merits nothing but wrath and damnation.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

¹⁹⁹ "*You shall not commit adultery.*"

²⁰⁰ The following commandments are easily understood from the preceding one. They all teach us to guard against harming our neighbor in any way. They are admirably arranged. First they deal with our neighbor's person. Then they proceed to the person nearest and dearest to him, namely, his wife, who is one flesh and blood with him. ⁷ In no possession of his can we inflict a greater injury upon him. Therefore, it is explicitly forbidden here to dishonor his wife. ²⁰¹ Adultery is particularly mentioned because among the Jewish people marriage was obligatory. Youths were married at the earliest age possible. The state of virginity was not commended, neither were public prostitution and lewdness tolerated as they are now. Accordingly adultery was the most common form of unchastity among them.

^(tr-639) ²⁰² Inasmuch as there is a shameful mess and cesspool of all kinds of vice and lewdness among us, this commandment applies to every form of unchastity, however it is called. Not only is the external act forbidden, but also every kind of cause, motive, and means. Your heart, your lips, and your whole body are to be chaste and to afford no occasion, aid, or encouragement to unchastity. ²⁰³ Moreover, you are to defend, protect, and rescue your neighbor whenever he is in danger or need, and on the contrary to aid and assist him so that he may retain his honor. ²⁰⁴ Whenever you fail to do this (though you could prevent a wrong) or wink at it as if it were no concern of yours, you are just as guilty as the culprit himself. ²⁰⁵ In short, everyone is required both to live chastely himself and to help

his neighbor do the same. Thus God by his commandment wants every husband or wife guarded and protected from any trespass.

²⁰⁶ Inasmuch as this commandment is concerned specifically with the estate of marriage and gives occasion to speak of it, let us carefully note, first, how highly God honors and glorifies the married life, sanctioning and protecting it by his commandment. He sanctioned it above in the fourth commandment, “You shall honor father and mother”; but here, as I said, he has secured it and protected it. ²⁰⁷ Therefore he also wishes us to honor, maintain, and cherish it as a divine and blessed estate. Significantly he established it as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for lewdness but to be true to each other, be fruitful, beget children, and support and bring them up to the glory of God.

²⁰⁸ God has therefore most richly blessed this estate above all others and, in addition, has supplied and endowed it with everything in the world in order that this estate might be provided for richly and adequately. Married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity, but it is a glorious institution and an object of God’s serious concern. For it is of the highest importance to him that persons be brought up to serve the world, promote knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues, and fight against wickedness and the devil.

²⁰⁹ Therefore I have always taught that we should not despise or disdain marriage, as the blind world and the false clergy do, but view it in the light of God’s Word, by which it is adorned and sanctified. It is not an estate to be placed on a level with the others; it precedes and surpasses them all, ^(tr-641) whether those of emperor, princes, bishops, or anyone else. Important as the spiritual and civil estates are, these must humble themselves and allow all people to enter the estate of marriage, as we shall hear. ²¹⁰ It is not an exceptional estate, but the most universal and the noblest, pervading all Christendom and even extending throughout all the world.

²¹¹ In the second place, remember that it is not only an honorable estate but also a necessary one, and it is solemnly commanded by God that in general men and women in all conditions, who have been created for it, shall be found in this estate. Yet there are some (although few) exceptions whom God has especially exempted — some who are unsuited for married life and others whom he has released by a high supernatural gift so that they can maintain chastity outside of marriage. ²¹² Where nature has its way, as God implanted it, it is not possible to remain chaste outside of marriage; for flesh and blood remain flesh and blood, and the natural inclinations and stimulations have their way without let or hindrance, as everyone’s observation and experience testify. Therefore, to make it easier for man to avoid unchastity in some measure, God has established marriage, so that everyone may have his allotted portion and be satisfied with it — although here, too, God’s grace is still required to keep the heart pure.

²¹³ From this you see how the papal rabble, priests, monks, and nuns resist God’s order and commandment when they despise and forbid marriage, and boast and vow that they will maintain perpetual chastity while they deceive the common people with lying words and wrong impressions. ²¹⁴ For no one has so little love and inclination for chastity as those who under the guise of great sanctity avoid marriage and either indulge in open and shameless fornication or secretly do even worse — things too evil to mention, as unfortunately has been only too well proved. ²¹⁵ In short, even though they abstain from the act, yet their hearts remain so full of unchaste thoughts and evil desires that they suffer incessant ragings of secret passion, which can be avoided in married life. ²¹⁶ Therefore all vows of chastity apart from marriage are condemned and annulled by this commandment; indeed, all poor, captive consciences deceived by their monastic vows are even commanded to forsake their unchaste existence and enter the married life. Even granting that the monastic life is godly, yet it is not in their

power to maintain chastity, and if they remain they will inevitably sin more and more against this commandment.

²¹⁷ I say these things in order that our young people may be led to acquire a love for married life and know that it is a blessed and God-pleasing estate. Thus it may in due time ^(tr-643) regain its proper honor, and there may be less of the filthy, dissolute, disorderly conduct which now is so rampant everywhere in public prostitution and other shameful vices resulting from contempt of married life. ²¹⁸ Therefore parents and magistrates have the duty of so supervising youth that they will be brought up to decency and respect for authority and, when they are grown, will be married honorably in the fear of God. Then God will add his blessing and grace so that men may have joy and happiness in their married life.

²¹⁹ Let it be said in conclusion that this commandment requires everyone not only to live chastely in thought, word, and deed in his particular situation (that is, especially in the estate of marriage), but also to love and cherish the wife or husband whom God has given. For marital chastity it is above all things essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity. This is one of the chief ways to make chastity attractive and desirable. Under such conditions chastity always follows spontaneously without any command. ²²⁰ This is why St. Paul so urgently admonishes husbands and wives to love and honor each other. ⁸ ²²¹ Here you have another precious good work — indeed, many and great works — which you can joyfully set over against all “spiritual estates” that are chosen without God’s Word and commandment.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

²²² *“You shall not steal.”*

²²³ Next to our own person and our spouse, our temporal property is dearest to us. This, too, God wants to have protected. He has forbidden us to rob or pilfer the possessions of our neighbor. ²²⁴ For to steal is nothing else than to acquire another’s property by unjust means. In a few words, this includes taking advantage of our neighbor in any sort of dealing that results in loss to him. Stealing is a widespread, common vice, but people pay so little attention to it that the matter is entirely out of hand. If all who are thieves, though they are unwilling to admit it, were hanged on the gallows, the world would soon be empty, and there would be a shortage of both hangmen and gallows. As I have just said, a person steals not only when he robs a man’s strongbox or his pocket, but also when he takes advantage of his neighbor at the market, in a grocery shop, butcher stall, wine- and beer-cellar, workshop, and, in short, wherever business is transacted and money is exchanged for goods or labor.

²²⁵ Let us make it a little clearer for the common people so that we may see how honest we are. Suppose, for example, that a man-servant or maid-servant is unfaithful in his or her domestic duty and does damage or permits damage to happen when it could have been avoided. Or ^(tr-645) suppose that through laziness, carelessness, or malice a servant wastes and neglects things to the vexation and annoyance of his master or mistress. When this is done deliberately — for I am not speaking of what happens inadvertently and unintentionally — a servant can cheat his employer out of thirty or forty gulden or more a year. If a thief had taken such sums he would be strangled with a noose, but the servant may even become defiant and insolent and dare anyone to call him a thief!

²²⁶ The same must be said of artisans, workmen, and day-laborers who act high-handedly and never know enough ways to overcharge people and yet are careless and unreliable in their work. All these are far worse than sneak-thieves, against whom we can guard with lock and bolt, or if we catch them we can deal with them so that they will not repeat the offense. But against the others no one can guard. No one even dares to give them a hard look or accuse them of theft. One would ten times rather lose the

money from one's purse. For these are my neighbors, my good friends, my own servants, from whom I expect good; but they are the first to defraud me.²²⁷ Furthermore, at the market and everyday business the same fraud prevails in full force. One person openly cheats another with defective merchandise, false measures, dishonest weights, and bad coins, and takes advantage of him by underhanded tricks and sharp practices and crafty dealing. Or again, one swindles another in a trade and deliberately fleeces, skins, and torments him. Who can even describe or imagine it all?²²⁸ In short, thievery is the most common craft and the largest guild on earth. If we look at mankind in all its conditions, it is nothing but a vast, wide stable full of great thieves.

²²⁹ These men are called gentlemen swindlers⁹ or big operators. Far from being picklocks and sneak-thieves who loot a cash box, they sit in office chairs and are called great lords and honorable, good citizens, and yet with a great show of legality they rob and steal.

²³⁰ Yes, we might well keep quiet here about various petty thieves in order to launch an attack against the great, powerful arch-thieves who consort with lords and princes and daily plunder not only a city or two, but all Germany. Indeed, what would become of the head and chief protector of all thieves, the Holy See at Rome, and all its retinue, which has plundered and stolen the treasures of the whole world and holds them to this day?

(tr-647) ²³¹ This, in short, is the way of the world. Those who can steal and rob openly are safe and free, unmolested by anyone, even claiming honor from men. Meanwhile the little sneak-thieves who have committed one offense must bear disgrace and punishment so as to make the others look respectable and honorable. But the latter should be told that in the eyes of God they are the greatest thieves, and that he will punish them as they deserve.

²³² This commandment is very far-reaching, as we have shown. It is necessary, therefore, to emphasize and explain it to the common people in order that they may be restrained in their wantonness and that the wrath of God may be continually and urgently kept before their eyes. For we must preach this not to Christians but chiefly to knaves and scoundrels, though it might be more fitting if the judge, the jailer, or the hangman did the preaching.²³³ Let every one know, then, that it is his duty, at the risk of God's displeasure, not to harm his neighbor, take advantage of him, or defraud him by any faithless or underhanded business transaction. More than that, he is under obligation faithfully to protect his neighbor's property and further his interests, especially when he takes remuneration for such services.

²³⁴ A person who willfully disregards this commandment may indeed get by and escape the hangman, but he will not escape God's wrath and punishment. Though he pursues his defiant and arrogant course for a long time, still he will remain a tramp and a beggar and will suffer all kinds of troubles and misfortunes.²³⁵ Now, you servants ought to take care of your master's or mistress's property, which enables you to stuff your craw and your belly. But you go your own way, take your wages like a thief, and even expect to be revered like noblemen. Many of you are even insolent toward masters and mistresses and unwilling to do them the favor and service of protecting them from loss.²³⁶ But see what you gain. When you come into property yourself and have a house of your own — which God will let you acquire to your undoing — there will come a day of reckoning and retribution: for every penny you have taken and for every penny's damage you have done you will have to pay back thirty-fold.

²³⁷ So will it be with artisans and day-laborers, from whom we are obliged to suffer such intolerable insolence. They act as if they were lords over others' possessions and entitled to whatever they demand.²³⁸ Just let them keep on boldly fleecing people as long as they can. God will not forget his commandment. He will pay them what they deserve. He will hang them not on a green gallows but on a dry one. They will neither prosper^(tr-649) nor gain anything their whole life long.¹²³⁹ Of course, if

our government were well regulated, such insolence might soon be checked. The ancient Romans, for example, promptly took such offenders by the scruff of the neck so that others took warning.

²⁴⁰ The same fate will overtake those who turn the free public market into a carrion-pit and a robbers' den. Daily the poor are defrauded. New burdens and high prices are imposed. Everyone misuses the market in his own willful, conceited, arrogant way, as if it were his right and privilege to sell his goods as dearly as he pleases without a word of criticism. ²⁴¹ We shall stand by and let such persons fleece, grab, and hoard. ²⁴² But we shall trust God, who takes matters into his own hands. After they have scrimped and scraped for a long time, he will pronounce this kind of blessing over them: "Your grain will spoil in the garner and your beer in the cellar. Your cattle will die in the stall. Yes, where you have cheated and defrauded anyone out of a gulden, your entire hoard will be consumed by rust so that you will never enjoy it."

²⁴³ Indeed, we have the evidence before our very eyes every day that no stolen or ill-gotten possession thrives. How many people scrape and scratch day and night and yet grow not a penny richer! Though they gather a great hoard, they must suffer so many troubles and misfortunes that they can never enjoy it or pass it on to their children. ²⁴⁴ But because we ignore this and act as if it were none of our business, God must punish us and teach us morals in a different way. He lays on us one affliction after another, or he quarters a troop of soldiers upon us; in one hour they clean out our chests and purse down to the last penny, and then by way of thanks they burn and ravage house and home and outrage and kill wife and children.

²⁴⁵ In short, however much you steal, depend on it that just as much will be stolen from you. Anyone who robs and takes things by violence and dishonesty must put up with another who plays the same game. For God is a master of this art; since everyone robs and steals from the other, he punishes one thief by means of another. Otherwise, where would we find enough gallows and ropes?

²⁴⁶ Whoever is willing to learn a lesson, let him know that this is God's commandment and must not be treated as ^(tr-651) a joke. We shall put up with those of you who despise, defraud, steal, and rob us. We shall endure your arrogance and show forgiveness and mercy, as the Lord's Prayer teaches. The upright, meanwhile, will not want, and you will hurt yourself more than others. But beware how you deal with the poor, of whom there are many now. ²⁴⁷ If, when you meet a poor man who must live from hand to mouth, you act as if everyone must live by your favor, you skin and scrape him right down to the bone, and you arrogantly turn him away whom you ought to give aid, he will go away wretched and dejected, and because he can complain to no one else, he will cry to heaven. Beware of this, I repeat, as of the devil himself. Such a man's sighs and cries will be no joking matter. They will have an effect too heavy for you and all the world to bear, for they will reach God, who watches over poor, sorrowful hearts, and he will not leave them unavenged. But if you despise and defy this, see whom you have brought upon yourself. If you succeed and prosper, before all the world you may call God and me liars.

²⁴⁸ We have now given sufficient warning and exhortation. He who will not heed or believe this may go his own way until he learns it by experience. But it needs to be impressed upon the young people so that they may be on their guard and not follow the old, wayward crowd, but may keep their eyes fixed upon God's commandment, lest his wrath and punishment come upon them too. ²⁴⁹ Our responsibility is only to instruct and reprove by means of God's Word. To restrain open lawlessness is the responsibility of princes and magistrates. They should be alert and resolute enough to establish and maintain order in all areas of trade and commerce in order that the poor may not be burdened and oppressed and in order that they may not themselves be charged with other men's sins.

²⁵⁰ Enough has been said concerning the nature of stealing. It is not to be confined to narrow limits but must extend to all our relations with our neighbors. To sum up, as we have done in the previous

commandments: On one hand, we are forbidden to do our neighbor any injury or wrong in any way imaginable, whether by damaging, withholding, or interfering with his possessions and property. We are not even to consent to or permit such a thing, but are rather to avert and prevent it.²⁵¹ On the other hand, we are commanded to promote and further our neighbor's interests, and when he suffers want we are to help, share, and lend to both friends and foes.

²⁵² Anyone who seeks and desires good works will here find ample opportunity to do things which are heartily acceptable and pleasing to God.^(tr-653) Moreover, he graciously lavishes upon them a wonderful blessing: We shall be richly rewarded for all the help and kindness we show to our neighbor, as King Solomon teaches in [Prov. 19:17](#), "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed."²⁵³ Here you have a rich Lord. Surely he is sufficient for your needs and will let you lack or want for nothing. Thus with a happy conscience you can enjoy a hundred times more than you could scrape together by perfidy and injustice. Whoever does not desire this blessing will find wrath and misfortune enough.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

²⁵⁴ *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."*

²⁵⁵ Besides our own body, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name, for it is intolerable to live among men in public disgrace and contempt.²⁵⁶ Therefore God will not have our neighbor deprived of his reputation, honor, and character any more than of his money and possessions; he would have every man maintain his self-respect before his wife, children, servants, and neighbors.²⁵⁷ In its first and simplest meaning, as the words stand ("You shall not bear false witness"), this commandment pertains to public courts of justice, where a poor, innocent man is accused and maligned by false witnesses and consequently punished in his body, property, or honor.

²⁵⁸ This problem appears to concern us only a little at present, but among the Jews it was extremely common. That nation had an excellent, orderly government, and even now, where there is such a government, instances of this sin still occur. The reason is this: Where judges, mayors, princes, or others in authority sit in judgment, we always find that, true to the usual course of the world, men are loathe to offend anyone. Instead, they speak dishonestly with an eye to gaining favor, money, prospects, or friendship. Consequently, a poor man is inevitably oppressed, loses his case, and suffers punishment. It is the universal misfortune of the world that men of integrity seldom preside in courts of justice.

²⁵⁹ A judge ought, above all, to be a man of integrity, and not only upright but also a wise, sagacious, brave, and fearless man. Likewise, a witness should be fearless; more than that, he should be an upright man. He who is to administer justice equitably^(tr-655) in all cases will often offend good friends, relatives, neighbors, and the rich and powerful who are in a position to help or harm him. He must therefore be quite blind, shutting his eyes and ears to everything but the evidence presented, and make his decision accordingly.

²⁶⁰ The first application of this commandment, then, is that everyone should help his neighbor maintain his rights. He must not allow these rights to be thwarted or distorted but should promote and resolutely guard them, whether he be judge or witness, let the consequences be what they may.²⁶¹ Here we have a goal set for our jurists: perfect justice and equity in every case. They should let right remain right, nor perverting or concealing or suppressing anything on account of anyone's money, property, honor, or power. This is one aspect of the commandment, and its plainest meaning, applying to all that takes place in court.

²⁶² Next, it extends much further when it is applied to spiritual jurisdiction or administration. Here, too, everyone bears false witness against his neighbor. Wherever there are godly preachers and Christians, they must endure having the world call them heretics, apostates, even seditious and accursed scoundrels. Moreover, the Word of God must undergo the most shameful and spiteful persecution and blasphemy; it is contradicted, perverted, misused, and misinterpreted. But let this pass; it is the blind world's nature to condemn and persecute the truth and the children of God and yet consider this no sin.

²⁶³ The third aspect of this commandment concerns us all. It forbids all sins of the tongue by which we may injure or offend our neighbor. False witness is clearly a work of the tongue. Whatever is done with the tongue against a neighbor, then, is forbidden by God. This applies to false preachers with their corrupt teaching and blasphemy, to false judges and witnesses with their corrupt behavior in court and their lying and malicious talk outside of court. ²⁶⁴ It applies particularly to the detestable, shameful vice of back-biting or slander by which the devil rides us. Of this much could be said. It is a common vice of human nature that everyone would rather hear evil than good about his neighbor. Evil though we are, we cannot tolerate having evil spoken of us; we want the golden compliments of the whole world. Yet we cannot bear to hear the best spoken of others.

²⁶⁵ To avoid this vice, therefore, we should note that nobody has the right to judge ^(tr-657) and reprove his neighbor publicly, even when he has seen a sin committed, unless he has been authorized to judge and reprove. ²⁶⁶ There is a great difference between judging sin and having knowledge of sin. Knowledge of sin does not entail the right to judge it. I may see and hear that my neighbor sins, but to make him the talk of the town is not my business. If I interfere and pass sentence on him, I fall into a greater sin than his. When you become aware of a sin, simply make your ears a tomb and bury it until you are appointed a judge and authorized to administer punishment by virtue of your office.

²⁶⁷ Those are called backbiters who are not content just to know but rush ahead and judge. Learning a bit of gossip about someone else, they spread it into every corner, relishing and delighting in it like pigs that roll in the mud and root around in it with their snouts. ²⁶⁸ This is nothing else than usurping the judgment and office of God, pronouncing the severest kind of verdict and sentence, for the harshest verdict a judge can pronounce is to declare somebody a thief, a murderer, a traitor, etc. Whoever therefore ventures to accuse his neighbor of such guilt assumes as much authority as the emperor and all magistrates. For though you do not wield the sword, you use your venomous tongue to the disgrace and harm of your neighbor.

²⁶⁹ Therefore God forbids you to speak evil about another even though, to your certain knowledge, he is guilty. All the more urgent is the prohibition if you are not sure but have it only from hearsay. ²⁷⁰ But you say: "Why shouldn't I speak if it is the truth?" I reply: "Why don't you bring it before the regular judge?" "Oh, I cannot prove it publicly; I might be called a liar and sent away in disgrace." Ah, now do you smell the roast? If you do not trust yourself to make your charges before the proper authorities, then hold your tongue. Keep your knowledge to yourself and do not give it out to others. For when you repeat a story that you cannot prove, even if it is true, you appear as a liar. Besides, you act like a knave, for no man should be deprived of his honor and good name unless these have first been taken away from him publicly.

²⁷¹ Every report, then, that cannot be adequately proved is false witness. ²⁷² No one should publicly assert as truth what is not publicly substantiated. In short, what is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or at any rate be ^(tr-659) reprovved in secret, as we shall hear. ²⁷³ Therefore, if you encounter somebody with a worthless tongue who gossips and slanders someone, rebuke him straight to his face and make him blush for shame. Then you will silence many a one who otherwise would bring some

poor man into disgrace, from which he could scarcely clear himself. For honor and good name are easily taken away, but not easily restored.

²⁷⁴ So you see that we are absolutely forbidden to speak evil of our neighbor. Exception is made, however, of civil magistrates, preachers, and parents, for we must interpret this commandment in such a way that evil shall not go unpunished. We have seen that the Fifth Commandment forbids us to injure anyone physically, and yet an exception is made of the hangman. By virtue of his office he does not do his neighbor good but only harm and evil, yet he does not sin against God's commandment because God of his own accord instituted that office, and as he warns in the Fifth Commandment, he has reserved to himself the right of punishment. Likewise, although no one has in his own person the right to judge and condemn anyone, yet if they whose duty it is fail to do so, they sin as much as those who take the law into their own hands without such a commission. ²⁷⁵ Necessity requires one to report evil, to prefer charges, to attest, examine, and witness. It is no different from the situation of the physician who, to cure a patient, is sometimes compelled to examine and handle his private parts. Just so, magistrates, parents, even brothers and sisters and other good friends are under mutual obligation to reprove evil where it is necessary and beneficial.

²⁷⁶ But the right way to deal with this matter would be to observe the order laid down by the Gospel, [Matthew 19](#), ² where Christ says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." Here you have a fine, precious precept for governing the tongue which ought to be carefully noted if we are to avoid this detestable abuse. Let this be your rule, then, that you should not be quick to spread slander and gossip about your neighbor but admonish him privately so that he may amend. Likewise, if someone should whisper to you what this or that person has done, teach him, if he saw the wrongdoing, to go and reprove the man personally, otherwise to hold his tongue.

²⁷⁷ This lesson you can learn from the daily management of the household. When the master of the house sees a servant failing to do his duty, he takes him to task personally. If he were so foolish as to leave the servant at home while he went out on the streets to complain to his neighbors, ^(tr-661) he would no doubt be told: "You fool! That is none of our business. Why don't you tell him yourself?" ²⁷⁸ And that would be the brotherly thing to say, for the evil would be corrected and the neighbor's honor maintained. As Christ himself says in the same passage, "If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." Then you have done a great and excellent work. Do you think it is an insignificant thing to gain a brother? Let all monks and holy orders step forth, with all their works heaped up together, and see if they can make the boast that they have gained one brother!

²⁷⁹ Christ teaches further: "If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses."³ So the individual is to be dealt with personally and not gossiped about behind his back. ²⁸⁰ If this does not help, then bring the matter before the public, either before the civil or the ecclesiastical court. Then you do not stand alone. You have witnesses with you through whom you can convict the guilty one and on whose testimony the judge can base his decision and sentence. This is the right procedure for restraining and reforming a wicked person. ²⁸¹ But if you gossip about someone in every corner and root around in the filth, nobody will be reformed. Moreover, when you are called upon to witness, you will probably deny having said anything. ²⁸² It would serve such gossips right to have their sport spoiled, as a warning to others. ²⁸³ If you were acting for your neighbor's improvement or from the love of truth, you would not sneak about in secret, shunning the light of day.

²⁸⁴ All this refers to secret sins. But where the sin is so public that the judge and the whole world are aware of it, you can without sin shun and avoid the person as one who has brought disgrace upon himself, and you may testify publicly concerning him. For when an affair is manifest to everybody

there can be no question of slander or injustice or false witness. For example, we now censure the pope and his teaching, which is publicly set forth in books and shouted throughout the world. Where the sin is public, the punishment ought to be public so that everyone may know how to guard against it.

²⁸⁵ Now we have the sum and substance of this commandment: No one shall harm his neighbor, whether friend or foe, with his tongue. No one shall speak evil of him, whether truly or falsely, unless it is done with proper authority or for his improvement. ^(tr-663) A person should use his tongue to speak only good of everyone, to cover his neighbor's sins and infirmities, to overlook them, and to cloak and veil them with his own honor. ²⁸⁶ Our chief reason for doing so should be the one which Christ indicates in the Gospel, and in which he means to embrace all the commandments concerning our neighbor, "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."⁴

²⁸⁷ Even nature teaches the same thing in our own bodies, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 12:22, 23, "The parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor; and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty." No one covers his face, eyes, nose, and mouth; we do not need to, for they are our most honorable members. But the weakest members, of which we are ashamed, we carefully conceal. Our hands and eyes, even the whole body, must help cover and veil them. ²⁸⁸ Thus in our relations with one another, we should veil whatever blemishes and infirmities we find in our neighbor, doing our utmost to serve and help him to promote his honor. On the other hand, we should prevent everything that tends to his disgrace. ²⁸⁹ It is a particularly fine, noble virtue always to put the best construction upon all we may hear about our neighbor, as long as it is not a notorious evil, and to defend him against the poisonous tongues of those who are busy wherever they can pry out and pounce on something to criticize in their neighbor, misconstruing and twisting things in the worst way. This is what happens now especially to the precious Word of God and its preachers.

²⁹⁰ This commandment, then, embraces a great multitude of good works which please God most highly and bring abundant blessings, if only the blind world and the false saints would recognize them.

²⁹¹ There is nothing about a man or in a man that can do greater good or greater harm, in spiritual or in temporal matters, than this smallest and weakest of his members, the tongue.⁵

THE NINTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS

²⁹² *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house."*

"You shall not covet his wife, man-servant, maid-servant, cattle, or anything that is his."

²⁹³ These two commandments, taken literally, were given exclusively to the Jews; nevertheless, in part they also apply to us. The Jews did not interpret them as referring to unchastity or theft, since these vices were sufficiently forbidden in commandments above. They thought they were keeping the commandments when they obeyed the ^(tr-665) injunctions and prohibitions contained in them. God therefore added these two commandments to teach them that it is sinful and forbidden to covet our neighbor's wife or property, or to have any designs on them. ²⁹⁴ Especially were these commandments needed because under the Jewish government man-servants and maid-servants were not free, as now, to serve for wages according to their own choice; with their body and all they had they were their master's property, the same as his cattle and other possessions. ²⁹⁵ Moreover, every man had power to dismiss his wife publicly by giving her a bill of divorce⁶ and to take another wife. So there was a danger among them that if anyone took a fancy to another's wife, he might on any flimsy excuse dismiss his own wife and estrange the other's from him so that he might legally take her. They considered this no more a sin or disgrace than it is now for a master to dismiss his servants or entice his neighbor's from him.

²⁹⁶ Therefore, I say, they interpreted these commandments correctly (though they also have a broader and higher application) to forbid anyone, even with a specious pretext, to covet or scheme to despoil his neighbor of what belongs to him, such as his wife, servants, house, fields, meadows, or cattle. Above, the seventh commandment prohibits seizing or withholding another's possessions to which you have no right. But here it is also forbidden to entice anything away from your neighbor, even though in the eyes of the world you could do it honorably, without accusation or blame for fraudulent dealing.

²⁹⁷ Such is nature that we all begrudge another's having as much as we have. Everyone acquires all he can and lets others look out for themselves. ²⁹⁸ Yet we all pretend to be upright. We know how to put up a fine front to conceal our rascality. We think up artful dodges and sly tricks (better and better ones are being devised daily) under the guise of justice. We brazenly dare to boast of it, and insist that it should be called not rascality but shrewdness and business acumen. ²⁹⁹ In this we are abetted by jurists and lawyers who twist and stretch the law to suit their purpose, straining words and using them for pretexts, without regard for equity or for our neighbor's plight. In short, whoever is sharpest and shrewdest in such affairs gets most advantage out of the law, for as the saying has it, "The law favors the vigilant." ³⁰⁰ This last commandment, then, is addressed not to those whom the world considers wicked rogues, but precisely to the most upright — to people who wish to be commended ^(tr-667) as honest and virtuous because they have not offended against the preceding commandments. To this class the Jews especially claimed to belong, as many great nobles, lords, and princes do now. For the common masses belong much farther down in the scale, where the Seventh Commandment applies, since they are not much concerned about questions of honor and right when it comes to acquiring possessions.

³⁰¹ This situation occurs most frequently in lawsuits in which someone sets out to gain and squeeze something out of his neighbor. For example, when people wrangle and wrestle over a large inheritance, real estate, etc., they resort to whatever arguments have the least semblance of right, so varnishing and garnishing them that the law supports them, and they gain such secure title to the property as to put it beyond complaint or dispute. ³⁰² Similarly, if anyone covets a castle, city, county, or other great estate, he practices bribery, through friendly connections and by any other means at his disposal, until the property is taken away from the owner and legally awarded to him with letters patent and the seal of the prince attesting that it was acquired lawfully.

³⁰³ The same thing happens in ordinary business affairs, where one cunningly slips something out of another's hand so that the victim is helpless to prevent it. Or, seeing an opportunity for profit — let us say, when a man because of adversity or debt cannot hold on to his property, nor yet sell it without loss — he hurries and worries him until he acquires a half or more of it; and yet this must not be considered as illegally acquired, but rather as honestly purchased. Hence the sayings, "First come, first served," and "Every man must look out for himself while others shift for themselves." ³⁰⁴ Who is ingenious enough to imagine how much he can acquire by such specious pretexts? The world does not consider this wrong, and it does not see that the neighbor is being taken advantage of and forced to sacrifice what he cannot spare without injury. Yet no one wishes this to happen to himself. From this it is clear that all these pretexts and shams are false.

³⁰⁵ This was also the case in ancient times with respect to wives. They knew tricks like this: If a man took a fancy to another woman, he managed, either personally or through others and by any of a number of ways, to make her husband displeased with her, or she became so disobedient and hard to live with that her husband was obliged to dismiss her and leave her to the other man. That sort of thing undoubtedly was quite prevalent in the time of the law, for ^(tr-669) we read even in the Gospel⁷ that King Herod took his brother's wife while the latter was still living, and yet posed as an honorable, upright

man, as St. Mark testifies. ³⁰⁶ Such examples, I trust, will not be found among us, except that someone may by trickery entice a rich bride away from another, for in the New Testament⁸ married people are forbidden to be divorced. But it is not uncommon among us for a person to lure away another's manservant or maid-servant or otherwise estrange them with fair words.

³⁰⁷ However these things may be, you must learn that God does not wish you to deprive your neighbor of anything that is his, letting him suffer loss while you gratify your greed, even though in the eyes of the world you might honorably retain the property. To do so is dark and underhanded wickedness, and, as we say, it is all done "under the hat"⁹ so as to escape detection. Although you may act as if you have wronged no one, you have trespassed on your neighbor's rights. It may not be called stealing or fraud, yet it is coveting — that is, having designs upon your neighbor's property, luring it away from him against his will, and begrudging what God gave him. ³⁰⁸ The judge and the public may have to leave you in possession of it, but God will not, for he sees your wicked heart and the deceitfulness of the world. If you give the world an inch, it will take a yard, and at length open injustice and violence follow.

³⁰⁹ Let these commandments therefore retain their general application. We are commanded not to desire harm to our neighbor, nor become accessory to it, nor give occasion for it; we are willingly to leave him what is his, and promote and protect whatever may be profitable and serviceable to him, as we wish that he would do to us. ³¹⁰ Thus these commandments are directed especially against envy and miserable covetousness, God's purpose being to destroy all the roots and causes of our injuries to our neighbors. Therefore he sets it forth in plain words: "You shall not covet," etc. Above all, he wants our hearts to be pure, even though as long as we live here we cannot reach that ideal. So this commandment remains, like all the rest, one that constantly accuses us and shows just how upright we really are in God's sight.

CONCLUSION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS¹

³¹¹ Here, then, we have the Ten Commandments, a summary of divine teaching on what we are to do to make our whole life pleasing to God. They are the true fountain from which all good works must ^(tr-671) spring, the true channel through which all good works must flow. Apart from these Ten Commandments no deed, no conduct can be good or pleasing to God, no matter how great or precious it may be in the eyes of the world.

³¹² Let us see, now, how our great saints can boast of their spiritual orders and the great, difficult works which they have fashioned while they neglect these commandments as if they were too insignificant or had been fulfilled long ago.

³¹³ It seems to me that we shall have our hands full to keep these commandments, practicing gentleness, patience, love toward enemies, chastity, kindness, etc., and all that these virtues involve. But such works are not important or impressive in the eyes of the world. They are not unusual and pompous, restricted to special times, places, rites, and ceremonies, but are common, everyday domestic duties of one neighbor toward another, with no show about them. ³¹⁴ On the other hand, those other works captivate all eyes and ears. Aided by great pomp, splendor, and magnificent buildings, they are so adorned that everything gleams and glitters. There is burning of incense, singing and ringing of bells, lighting of tapers and candles until nothing else can be seen or heard. For when a priest stands in a gold-embroidered chasuble² or a layman remains on his knees a whole day in church, this is considered a precious work that cannot be sufficiently extolled. But when a poor girl tends a little child, or faithfully does what she is told, that is regarded as nothing. Otherwise, why should monks and nuns go into cloisters?

³¹⁵ Just think, is it not a devilish presumption on the part of those desperate saints to dare to find a higher and better way of life than the Ten Commandments teach? They pretend, as we have said, that this is a simple life for the ordinary man, whereas theirs is for the saints and the perfect. ³¹⁶ They fail to see, these miserable, blind people, that no man can achieve so much as to keep one of the Ten Commandments as it ought to be kept. Both the Creed and the Lord's Prayer must help us, as we shall hear. Through them we must seek and pray for help and receive it continually. Therefore all their boasting amounts to as much as if I boasted, "Of course, I haven't a single groschen to pay, but I promise to pay ten gulden."³

^(tr-673) ³¹⁷ All this I say and repeat in order that men may get rid of the pernicious abuse which has become so deeply rooted and still clings to every man, and that all classes of men on earth may accustom themselves to look only to these precepts and heed them. It will be a long time before men produce a doctrine or social order equal to that of the Ten Commandments, for they are beyond human power to fulfill. Anyone who does fulfill them is a heavenly, angelic man, far above all holiness on earth. ³¹⁸ Just concentrate upon them and test yourself thoroughly, do your very best, and you will surely find so much to do that you will neither seek nor pay attention to any other works or other kind of holiness.

³¹⁹ Let this suffice concerning the first part,⁴ both for instruction and for admonition. In conclusion, however, we must repeat the text which we have already treated above in connection with the First Commandment⁵ in order to show how much effort God requires us to devote to learning how to teach and practice the Ten Commandments.

³²⁰ *"I the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; but to those who love me and keep my commandments, I show mercy unto a thousand generations."*

³²¹ Although primarily attached to the First Commandment, as we heard above, this appendix was intended to apply to all the commandments, and all of them as a whole ought to be referred and directed to it. For this reason I said that we should keep it before the young and insist that they learn and remember it so that we may see why we are constrained and compelled to keep these Ten Commandments. This appendix ought to be regarded as attached to each individual commandment, penetrating and pervading them all.

³²² Now, as we said before, these words contain both a wrathful threat and a friendly promise, not only to terrify and warn us but also to attract and allure us. These words, therefore, ought to be received and esteemed as a serious matter to God because he himself here declares how important the commandments are to him and how strictly he will watch over them, fearfully and terribly punishing all who despise and transgress his commandments; and again, how richly he will reward, bless, and bestow all good things on those who prize them and gladly act and live in accordance with them. ³²³ Thus he demands that all our actions proceed from a heart that fears and regards God alone and, because of this fear, avoids all that is contrary to his will, lest he be moved to wrath; and, conversely, trusts ^(tr-675) him alone and for his sake does all that he asks of us, because he shows himself a kind father and offers us every grace and blessing.

³²⁴ This is exactly the meaning and right interpretation of the first and chief commandment, from which all the others proceed. This word, "You shall have no other gods," means simply, "You shall fear, love, and trust me as your one true God." Wherever a man's heart has such an attitude toward God, he has fulfilled this commandment and all the others. On the one hand, whoever fears and loves anything else in heaven and on earth will keep neither this nor any other. ³²⁵ Thus the entire Scriptures have proclaimed and presented this commandment everywhere, emphasizing these two things, fear of God and trust in God. The prophet David particularly teaches it throughout the Psalter, as when he

says, “The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his mercy” (Ps. 147:11). He seems to explain the whole commandment in one verse, as if to say, “The Lord takes pleasure in those who have no other gods.”

³²⁶ Thus the First Commandment is to illuminate and impart its splendor to all the others. In order that this may be constantly repeated and never forgotten, therefore, you must let these concluding words run through all the commandments, like the clasp or the hoop of a wreath that binds the end to the beginning and holds everything together. For example, in the Second Commandment we are told to fear God and not take his name in vain by cursing, lying, deceiving, and other kinds of corruption and wickedness, but to use his name properly by calling upon him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, which spring from that love and trust which the First Commandment requires. Similarly, this fear, love, and trust should impel us not to despise his Word, but learn it, hear it gladly, keep it holy, and honor it.

³²⁷ So, through the following commandments which concern our neighbor, everything proceeds from the force of the First Commandment: We are to honor father and mother, masters, and all in authority, being submissive and obedient to them not on their own account but for God’s sake. For you dare not respect or fear father or mother wrongly, doing or omitting to do things simply in order to please them. Rather, ask what God wants of you and what he will quite surely demand of you. If you omit that, you have an angry judge; otherwise, you have a gracious father.

³²⁸ Again, you are to do your neighbor no harm, injury, or violence, nor in any way molest him, either in his person, his wife, his property, his honor or rights, as these things are commanded in that order, even though you have ^(tr-677) the opportunity and occasion to do so and no man may reprove you. On the contrary, you should do good to all men, help them and promote their interests, however and whenever you can, purely out of love to God and in order to please him, in the confidence that he will abundantly reward you for all you do. ³²⁹ Thus you see how the First Commandment is the chief source and fountainhead from which all the others proceed; again, to it they all return and upon it they depend, so that end and beginning are all linked and bound together.

³³⁰ It is useful and necessary always to teach, admonish, and remind young people of all this so that they may be brought up, not only with blows and compulsion, like cattle, but in the fear and reverence of God. These are not trifles of men but the commandments of the most high God, who watches over them with great earnestness, who vents his wrath upon those who despise them, and, on the contrary, abundantly rewards those who keep them. Where men consider this and take it to heart, there will arise a spontaneous impulse and desire gladly to do God’s will. ³³¹ Therefore it is not without reason that the Old Testament commands men to write the Ten Commandments on every wall and corner, and even on their garments.⁶ Not that we are to have them there merely for a display, as the Jews did,⁷ but we are to keep them incessantly before our eyes and constantly in our memory, and practice them in all our works and ways. ³³² Everyone is to make them his daily habit in all circumstances, in all his affairs and dealings, as if they were written everywhere he looks, and even wherever he goes or wherever he stands. Thus, both for himself at home, and abroad among his neighbors, he will find occasion enough to practice the Ten Commandments, and no one need search far for them.

³³³ From all this it is obvious once again how highly these Ten Commandments are to be exalted and extolled above all orders, commands, and works which are taught and practiced apart from them. Here we can fling out the challenge: Let all wise men and saints step forward and produce, if they can, any work like that which God in these commandments so earnestly requires and enjoins under threat of his greatest wrath and punishment, while at the same time he adds such glorious promises that he will shower us with all good things and blessings. Therefore we should prize and value them above all other teachings as the greatest treasure God has given us. ^(tr-679)

SECOND PART: THE CREED

¹ Thus far we have heard the first part of Christian doctrine. In it we have seen all that God wishes us to do or not to do. The Creed properly follows, setting forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in brief, it teaches us to know him perfectly. ² It is given in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require of us. For, as we said above, they are set on so high a plane that all human ability is far too feeble and weak to keep them. Therefore it is as necessary to learn this part as it is the other so that we may know where and how to obtain strength for this task. ³ If we could by our own strength keep the Ten Commandments as they ought to be kept, we would need neither the Creed nor the Lord's Prayer. ⁴ But before we explain the advantage and necessity of the Creed, it is sufficient, as a first step, for very simple persons to learn to understand the Creed itself.

⁵ In the first place, the Creed used to be divided into twelve articles. ⁸ Of course, if all the thoughts contained in the Scriptures and belonging to the Creed were gathered together, there would be many more articles, nor could they all be clearly expressed in so few words. ⁶ But to make it most clear and simple for teaching to children, we shall briefly sum up the entire Creed in three articles, ⁹ according to the three persons of the Godhead, to whom all that we believe is related. The first article, of God the Father, explains creation; the second, of the Son, redemption; the third, of the Holy Spirit, sanctification. ⁷ Hence the Creed may be briefly comprised in these few words: "I believe in God the Father, who created me; I believe in God the Son, who redeemed me; I believe in the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies me." One God and one faith, but three persons, and therefore three articles or confessions. ⁸ Let us briefly comment on these words.

THE FIRST ARTICLE

⁹ *"I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth."*

¹⁰ These words give us a brief description of God the Father, his nature, his will, and his work. Since the Ten Commandments have explained that we are to have no more than one God, it may be asked: "What kind of being is God? What does he do? How can we praise or portray or describe him in such a way as to make him known?" This is taught here and in the following articles. Thus the Creed is ^(tr-681) nothing else than a response and confession of Christians based on the First Commandment. ¹¹ If you were to ask a young child, "My boy, what kind of God have you? What do you know about him?" he could say, "First, my God is the Father, who made heaven and earth. Apart from him alone I have no other God, for there is no one else who could create heaven and earth."

¹² For the somewhat more advanced and the educated, however, all three articles can be treated more fully and divided into as many parts as there are words. But for young pupils it is enough to indicate the most necessary points, namely, as we have said, that this article deals with creation. We should emphasize the words, "maker of heaven and earth." ¹³ What is meant by these words, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker," etc.? Answer: I hold and believe that I am a creature of God; that is, that he has given and constantly sustains my body, soul, and life, my members great and small, all the faculties of my mind, my reason and understanding, and so forth; my food and drink, clothing, means of support, wife and child, servants, house and home, etc. ¹⁴ Besides, he makes all creation help provide the comforts and necessities of life — sun, moon, and stars in the heavens, day and night, air, fire, water, the earth and all that it brings forth, birds and fish, beasts, grain and all kinds of produce. ¹⁵ Moreover, he gives all physical and temporal blessings — good government, peace, security. ¹⁶ Thus we learn from this article that none of us has his life of himself, or anything else that has been

mentioned here or can be mentioned, nor can he by himself preserve any of them, however small and unimportant. All this is comprehended in the word “Creator.”

¹⁷ Moreover, we confess that God the Father not only has given us all that we have and see before our eyes, but also daily guards and defends us against every evil and misfortune, warding off all sorts of danger and disaster. All this he does out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a kind father who cares for us so that no evil may befall us. ¹⁸ But further discussion of this subject belongs in the other two parts of this article, where we say, “Father almighty.”

¹⁹ Hence, since everything we possess, and everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily given and sustained by God, it inevitably follows that we are in duty bound to love, praise, and thank him without ceasing, and, in short, to devote all these things to his service, as he has required and enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

²⁰ Much could be said if we were to describe in detail how few people believe this ^(tr-683) article. We all pass over it, hear it, and recite it, but we neither see nor consider what the words enjoin on us. ²¹ For if we believed it with our whole heart, we would also act accordingly, and not swagger about and brag and boast as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride and greed, pleasure and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord and Creator.

²² Therefore, this article would humble and terrify us all if we believed it. For we sin daily with eyes and ears, hands, body and soul, money and property, and with all that we have. This is especially true of those who even fight against the Word of God. Yet Christians have this advantage, that they acknowledge themselves in duty bound to serve and obey him for all these things.

²³ For this reason we ought daily to study this article and impress it upon our minds. Everything we see, and every blessing that comes our way, should remind us of it. When we escape distress or danger, we should recognize that this is God’s doing. He gives us all these things so that we may sense and see in them his fatherly heart and his boundless love toward us. Thus our hearts will be warmed and kindled with gratitude to God and a desire to use all these blessings to his glory and praise.

²⁴ Such, very briefly, is the meaning of this article. It is all that ordinary people need to learn at first, both about what we have and receive from God and about what we owe him in return. This is an excellent knowledge, but an even greater treasure. For here we see how the Father has given himself to us, with all his creatures, has abundantly provided for us in this life, and, further, has showered us with inexpressible eternal treasures through his Son and the Holy Spirit, as we shall hear.

THE SECOND ARTICLE

²⁵ *“And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: he descended into hell, the third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and is seated on the right ^(tr-685) hand of God, the Father almighty, whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.”*

²⁶ Here we learn to know the second person of the Godhead, and we see what we receive from God over and above the temporal goods mentioned above — that is, how he has completely given himself to us, withholding nothing. This article is very rich and far-reaching, but in order to treat it briefly and simply, we shall take up one phrase which contains the substance of the article; from it we shall learn how we are redeemed. We shall concentrate on these words, “in Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

²⁷ If you are asked, “What do you believe in the Second Article, concerning Jesus Christ?” answer briefly, “I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord.” What is it to “become a

Lord”? It means that he has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil. Before this I had no Lord and King but was captive under the power of the devil. I was condemned to death and entangled in sin and blindness.

²⁸ When we were created by God the Father, and had received from him all kinds of good things, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil. We lay under God’s wrath and displeasure, doomed to eternal damnation, as we had deserved. ²⁹ There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on our misery and wretchedness and came from heaven to help us. ³⁰ Those tyrants and jailers now have been routed, and their place has been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and righteousness and every good and blessing. He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father’s favor and grace. He has taken us as his own, under his protection, in order that he may rule us by his righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.

³¹ Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word “Lord” simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there. The remaining parts of this article simply serve to clarify and express how and by what means this redemption was accomplished — that is, how much it cost Christ and what he paid and risked in order to win us and bring us under his dominion. That is to say, ^(tr-687) he became man, conceived and born without sin, of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin, that he might become Lord over sin; moreover, he suffered, died, and was buried that he might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owed, not with silver and gold but with his own precious blood. All this in order to become my Lord. For he did none of these things for himself, nor had he any need of them. Afterward he rose again from the dead, swallowed up¹ and devoured death, and finally ascended into heaven and assumed dominion at the right hand of the Father. The devil and all powers, therefore, must be subject to him and lie beneath his feet until finally, at the last day, he will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc.

³² But the proper place to explain all these different points is not the brief children’s sermons, but rather the longer sermons throughout the year, especially at the times appointed² for dealing at length with such articles as the birth, passion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

³³ Indeed, the entire Gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this article. Upon it all our salvation and blessedness are based, and it is so rich and broad that we can never learn it fully.

THE THIRD ARTICLE

³⁴ *“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”*

³⁵ To this article, as I have said, I cannot give a better title than “Sanctification.” In it is expressed and portrayed the Holy Spirit and his office, which is that he makes us holy. Therefore, we must concentrate on the term “Holy Spirit,” because it is so precise that we can find no substitute for it. ³⁶ Many other kinds of spirits are mentioned in the Scriptures, such as the spirit of man,³ heavenly spirits,⁴ and the evil spirit.⁵ But God’s Spirit alone is called Holy Spirit, that is, he who has sanctified and still sanctifies us. As the Father is called Creator and the Son is called Redeemer, so on account of his work the Holy Spirit must be called Sanctifier, the One who makes holy. ³⁷ How does this sanctifying take place? Answer: Just as the Son obtains dominion by purchasing us through his birth, death, and resurrection, etc., so the Holy Spirit effects our sanctification through the following: the communion of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the

life everlasting. In other words, he first leads us into his holy community, placing us upon the bosom of the church, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ.

^(tr-689) ³⁸ Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation. ³⁹ Therefore to sanctify is nothing else than to bring us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, which we could not obtain by ourselves.

⁴⁰ Learn this article, then, as clearly as possible. If you are asked, What do you mean by the words, “I believe in the Holy Spirit”? you can answer, “I believe that the Holy Spirit makes me holy, as his name implies.” ⁴¹ How does he do this? By what means? Answer: “Through the Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” ⁴² In the first place, he has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it he illumines and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.

⁴³ Where he does not cause the Word to be preached and does not awaken understanding in the heart, all is lost. This was the case under the papacy, where faith was entirely shoved under the bench and no one recognized Christ as the Lord, or the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier. That is, no one believed that Christ is our Lord in the sense that he won for us this treasure without our works and merits and made us acceptable to the Father. ⁴⁴ What was lacking here? There was no Holy Spirit present to reveal this truth and have it preached. Men and evil spirits there were, teaching us to obtain grace and be saved by our works. ⁴⁵ Therefore there was no Christian church. For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian church, and outside it no one can come to the Lord Christ. ⁴⁶ Let this suffice concerning the substance of this article. But since various points in it are not quite clear to the common people, we shall run through them also.

⁴⁷ The Creed calls the holy Christian church a *communio sanctorum*, “a communion of saints.” Both expressions ^(tr-691) have the same meaning. In early times the latter phrase was missing, ⁶ and it is unintelligible in our translation. If it is to be rendered idiomatically, we must express it quite differently. The word *ecclesia* properly means an assembly. ⁴⁸ We, however, are accustomed to the term *Kirche*, “church,” by which simple folk understand not a group of people but a consecrated house or building. But the house should not be called a church except for the single reason that the group of people assembles there. For we who assemble select a special place and give the house its name by virtue of the assembly. Thus the word “church” (*Kirche*) really means nothing else than a common assembly; it is not of German but of Greek origin, like the word *ecclesia*. In that language the word is *kyria*, and in Latin *curia*. ⁷ In our mother tongue therefore it ought to be called “a Christian congregation or assembly,” ⁸ or best and most clearly of all, “a holy Christian people.” ⁹

⁴⁹ Likewise the word *communio*, which is appended, should not be translated “communion” but “community.” ¹ It is nothing but a comment or interpretation by which someone wished to explain what the Christian church is. But some among us, who understand neither Latin nor German, have rendered this “communion of saints,” although no German would use or understand such an expression. To speak idiomatically, we ought to say “a community of saints,” that is, a community composed only of saints, or, still more clearly, “a holy community.” ⁵⁰ This I say in order that the expression may be

understood; it has become so established in usage that it cannot well be uprooted, and it would be next to heresy to alter a word.

⁵¹ This is the sum and substance of this phrase: I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism.⁵² Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner² in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought to it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the first step in entering it. Before we had advanced this far, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ.⁵³ Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community ^(tr-693) or Christian people. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit.

⁵⁴ Further we believe that in this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins, which is granted through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire Gospel. Toward forgiveness is directed everything that is to be preached concerning the sacraments and, in short, the entire Gospel and all the duties of Christianity. Forgiveness is needed constantly, for although God's grace has been won by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the unity of the Christian church, yet because we are encumbered with our flesh we are never without sin.

⁵⁵ Therefore everything in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs³ appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are in the Christian church, where there is full forgiveness of sin. God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with, and aid one another.

⁵⁶ But outside the Christian church (that is, where the Gospel is not) there is no forgiveness, and hence no holiness. Therefore, all who seek to merit holiness through their works rather than through the Gospel and the forgiveness of sin have expelled and separated themselves from the church.

⁵⁷ Meanwhile, since holiness has begun and is growing daily, we await the time when our flesh will be put to death, will be buried with all its uncleanness, and will come forth gloriously and arise to complete and perfect holiness in a new, eternal life.⁵⁸ Now we are only halfway pure and holy. The Holy Spirit must continue to work in us through the Word, daily granting forgiveness until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness. In that life are only perfectly pure and holy people, full of goodness and righteousness, completely freed from sin, death, and all evil, living in new, immortal and glorified bodies.

⁵⁹ All this, then, is the office and work of the Holy Spirit, to begin and daily to increase holiness on earth through these ^(tr-695) two means, the Christian church and the forgiveness of sins. Then, when we pass from this life, he will instantly perfect our holiness and will eternally preserve us in it by means of the last two parts of this article.

⁶⁰ The term "resurrection of the flesh," however, is not well chosen. When we Germans hear the word *Fleisch* (flesh), we think no farther than the butcher shop. Idiomatically we would say "resurrection of the body."⁴ However, this is not of great importance, as long as the words are rightly understood.

⁶¹ This, then, is the article which must always remain in force. Creation is past and redemption is accomplished, but the Holy Spirit carries on his work unceasingly until the last day. For this purpose he has appointed a community on earth, through which he speaks and does all his work.⁶² For he has not yet gathered together all his Christian people, nor has he completed the granting of forgiveness.

Therefore we believe in him who daily brings us into this community through the Word, and imparts, increases, and strengthens faith through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins. Then when his work has been finished and we abide in it, having died to the world and all evil, he will finally make us perfectly and eternally holy. We now wait in faith for this to be accomplished through the Word.

⁶³ Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will, and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but rich words. In them consists all our wisdom, which surpasses all the wisdom, understanding, and reason of men. Although the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God is and what he thinks and does, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure. ⁶⁴ In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. ⁶⁵ As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁶ These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and distinguish us Christians from all other ^(tr-697) people on earth. All who are outside the Christian church, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God, nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing. Therefore they remain in eternal wrath and damnation, for they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁷ Now you see that the Creed is a very different teaching from the Ten Commandments. The latter teach us what we ought to do; the Creed tells us what God does for us and gives to us. The Ten Commandments, moreover, are inscribed in the hearts of all men. ⁵ No human wisdom can comprehend the Creed; it must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone. ⁶⁸ Therefore the Ten Commandments do not by themselves make us Christians, for God's wrath and displeasure still remain on us because we cannot fulfill his demands. But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us upright and pleasing to God. ⁶⁹ Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see that God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and his power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments: the Father gives us all creation, Christ all his works, the Holy Spirit all his gifts.

⁷⁰ For the present this is enough concerning the Creed to lay a foundation for the common people without overburdening them. After they understand the substance of it, they may on their own initiative learn more, relating these teachings of the Catechism all that they learn in the Scriptures, and thus advance and grow richer in understanding. For as long as we live we shall have enough to preach and learn on the subject of faith.

THIRD PART: THE LORD'S PRAYER

¹ We have heard what we are to do and believe. The best and most blessed life consists of these things. Now follows the third part, how we are to pray. ² Mankind is in such a situation that no one can keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, even though he has begun to believe. Besides, the devil, along with the world and our flesh, resists our efforts with all his power. Consequently nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and drum into his ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and obedience to the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our

way and hinders us from fulfilling them. ³ That we may know what and how to pray, our Lord Christ himself has taught us both the way and the words, as we shall see.

^(tr-699) ⁴ Before we explain the Lord's Prayer part by part, it is very necessary to exhort and draw people to prayer, as Christ and the apostles also did. ⁶ ⁵ The first thing to know is this: It is our duty to pray because God has commanded it. We were told in the Second Commandment, "You shall not take God's name in vain." Thereby we are required to praise the holy name and pray or call upon it in every need. For to call upon it is nothing else than to pray. ⁶ Prayer, therefore, is as strictly and solemnly commanded as all the other commandments, such as having no other God, not killing, not stealing, etc. Let no one think that it makes no difference whether I pray or not, as vulgar people do who say in their delusion: "Why should I pray? Who knows whether God heeds my prayer or cares to hear it? If I do not pray, someone else will." Thus they fall into the habit of never praying, alleging that since we reject false and hypocritical prayers we teach that there is no duty or need to pray.

⁷ It is quite true that the kind of babbling and bellowing that used to pass for prayers in the church was not really prayer. Such external repetition, when properly used, may serve as an exercise for young children, pupils, and simple folk; while it may be called singing or reading exercise, it is not really prayer. ⁸ To pray, as the Second Commandment teaches, is to call upon God in every need. This God requires of us; he has not left it to our choice. It is our duty and obligation to pray if we want to be Christians, just as it is our duty and obligation to obey our fathers and mothers and the civil authorities. By invocation and prayer the name of God is glorified and used to good purpose. This you should note above all, so that you may silence and repel any thoughts that would prevent or deter us from praying. ⁹ It would be improper for a son to say to his father: "What is the use of being obedient? I will go and do as I please; what difference does it make?" But there stands the commandment, "You shall and must obey!" Just so, it is not left to my choice here whether to pray or not, but it is my duty and obligation [on pain of God's wrath and displeasure]. ⁷

¹⁰ [This should be kept in mind above all things so that you may silence and repel thoughts which would prevent or deter us from praying, as though it made no great difference if we do not pray, or as though prayer were commanded for those who are holier and in better favor with God than we are. Indeed, the human heart is by nature so desperately wicked that it always flees from God, thinking that he neither wants nor cares for our prayers because we are sinners and have merited nothing but wrath.

¹¹ Against such thoughts, I say, we should respect ^(tr-701) this commandment and turn to God so that we may not provoke his anger by such disobedience. By this commandment he makes it clear that he will not cast us out or drive us away, even though we are sinners; he wishes rather to draw us to himself so that we may humble ourselves before him, lament our misery and plight, and pray for grace and help. Therefore we read in the Scriptures that he is angry because those who were struck down for their sin did not return to him and assuage his wrath and seek grace by their prayers.]

¹² From the fact that prayer is so urgently commanded, we ought to conclude that we should by no means despise our prayers, but rather prize them highly. Take an illustration from the other commandments. ¹³ A child should never despise obedience to his father and mother, but should always reflect: "This is a work of obedience, and what I do has no other purpose than that it befits obedience and the commandment of God. On this I can rely and depend, and I can revere it highly, not because of my worthiness, but because of the commandment." So, too, here. What we shall pray, and for what, we should regard as demanded by God and done in obedience to him. We should think, "On my account this prayer would amount to nothing; but it is important because God has commanded it." So, no matter what he has to pray for, everybody should always approach God in obedience to this commandment.

¹⁴ We therefore urgently beg and exhort everyone to take these words to heart and in no case to despise prayer. Prayer used to be taught, in the devil's name, in such a way that no one paid any attention to it, and men supposed it was enough if the act was performed, whether God heard it or not. But that is to stake prayer on luck and to mumble aimlessly. Such a prayer is worthless.

¹⁵ We allow ourselves to be hindered and deterred by such thoughts as these: "I am not holy enough or worthy enough; if I were as godly and holy as St. Peter or St. Paul, then I would pray." Away with such thoughts! The very commandment that applied to St. Paul applies also to me. The Second Commandment is given just as much on my account as on his. He can boast of no better or holier commandment than I.

¹⁶ Therefore you should say: "The prayer I offer is just as precious, holy, and pleasing to God as those of St. Paul and the holiest of saints. The reason is this: I freely admit that he is holier in respect to his person, but not on account of the commandment. God does not regard prayer on account of the person, but on account of his Word and the obedience accorded it. On ^(tr-705) this commandment, on which all the saints base their prayer, I, too, base mine. Moreover, I pray for the same thing for which they all pray, or ever have prayed."⁸

¹⁷ This is the first and most important point, that all our prayers must be based on obedience to God, regardless of our person, whether we be sinners or saints, worthy or unworthy. ¹⁸ We must learn that God will not have this commandment treated as a jest but will be angry and punish us if we do not pray, just as he punishes all other kinds of disobedience. Nor will he allow our prayers to be frustrated or lost, for if he did not intend to answer you, he would not have ordered you to pray and backed it up with such a strict commandment.

¹⁹ In the second place, we should be all the more urged and encouraged to pray because God has promised that our prayer will surely be answered, as he says in **Ps. 50:15**, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you," and Christ says in **Matt. 7:7, 8**, "Ask and it will be given you," etc. "For every one who asks receives."²⁰ Such promises certainly ought to awaken and kindle in our hearts a desire and love to pray. For by his Word God testifies that our prayer is heartily pleasing to him and will assuredly be heard and granted, so that we may not despise or disdain it or pray uncertainly.

²¹ This you can hold up to him and say, "I come to Thee, dear Father, and pray not of my own accord or because of my own worthiness, but at thy commandment and promise, which cannot fail or deceive me." Whoever does not believe this promise should realize once again that he angers God, grossly dishonoring him and accusing him of falsehood.

²² Furthermore, we should be encouraged and drawn to pray because, in addition to this commandment and promise, God takes the initiative and puts into our mouths the very words we are to use. Thus we see how sincerely he is concerned over our needs, and we shall never doubt that our prayer pleases him and will assuredly be heard. ²³ So this prayer is far superior to all others that we might ourselves devise. For in the latter our conscience would always be in doubt, saying, "I have prayed, but who knows whether it pleased him, or whether I have hit upon the right form and mode?" Thus there is no nobler prayer to be found on earth,⁹ for it has the excellent testimony that God loves to hear it. This we should not trade for all the riches in the world.

²⁴ It has been prescribed for this reason, also, that we should reflect on our needs, which ought to drive and impel us to ^(tr-705) pray without ceasing. A person who wants to pray must present a petition, naming and asking for something which he desires; otherwise it cannot be called a prayer.

²⁵ Therefore we have rightly rejected the prayers of monks and priests, who howl and growl frightfully day and night; not one of them thinks of asking for the least thing. If we gathered all the churches together, with all their clergy, they would have to confess that they never prayed whole-

heartedly for so much as a drop of wine. None of them has ever undertaken to pray out of obedience to God and faith in his promise, or out of consideration for his own needs. They only thought, at best, of doing a good work as a payment to God, not willing to receive anything from him, but only to give him something.

²⁶ But where there is true prayer there must be earnestness. We must feel our need, the distress that impels and drives us to cry out. Then prayer will come spontaneously, as it should, and we shall not need to be taught how to prepare for it or how to generate devotion. ²⁷ The need which ought to be the concern of both ourselves and others is quite amply indicated in the Lord's Prayer. Therefore it may serve to remind us and impress upon us not to become negligent about praying. We all have needs enough, but the trouble is that we do not feel or see them. God therefore wishes you to lament and express your needs and wants, not because he is unaware of them, but in order that you may kindle your heart to stronger and greater desires and spread your cloak wide to receive many things.

²⁸ Each of us should form the habit from his youth up to pray daily for all his needs, whenever he is aware of anything that affects him or other people around him, such as preachers, magistrates, neighbors, servants; and, as we have said, he should always remind God of his commandment and promise, knowing that he will not have them despised. ²⁹ This I say because I would like to see the people brought again to pray rightly and not act so crudely and coldly that they become daily more inept at praying. This is just what the devil wants and works for with all his might, for he is well aware what damage and harm he suffers when prayer is in proper use.

³⁰ This we must know, that all our safety and protection consist in prayer alone. We ^(tr-707) are far too weak to cope with the devil and all his might and his forces arrayed against us, trying to trample us under foot. Therefore we must carefully select the weapons with which Christians ought to arm themselves in order to stand against the devil. ³¹ What do you think has accomplished such great results in the past, parrying the counsels and plots of our enemies and checking their murderous and seditious designs by which the devil expected to crush us, and the Gospel as well, except that the prayers of a few godly men intervened like an iron wall on our side? Otherwise they would have witnessed a far different drama: the devil would have destroyed all Germany in its own blood. Now they may confidently ridicule and mock. But by prayer alone we shall be a match both for them and for the devil, if we only persevere diligently and do not become slack. ³² For whenever a good Christian prays, "Dear Father, thy will be done," God replies from on high, "Yes, dear child, it shall indeed be done in spite of the devil and all the world."

³³ Let this be said as an admonition in order that men may learn above all to value prayer as a great and precious thing and may clearly distinguish between vain babbling and praying for something definite. We by no means reject prayer, but we do denounce the utterly useless howling and growling, as Christ himself rejects and forbids great wordiness.¹ ³⁴ Now we shall treat the Lord's Prayer very briefly and clearly. In seven successive articles or petitions are comprehended all the needs that continually beset us, each one so great that it should impel us to keep praying for it all our lives.

¹Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church (The Large Catechism: -3, 34). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.