

THAT DOCTRINES OF MEN ARE TO BE REJECTED TOGETHER WITH A REPLY TO TEXTS QUOTED IN DEFENCE OF THE DOCTRINES OF MEN (VON MENSCHENLEHREN ZU MEIDEN) - INTRODUCTION

“Silver and gold have I none: but such as I have give I thee.” Somewhat in the spirit of these words Luther had planned to dedicate a small book to his host of the Wartburg, Hans von Berlepsch. For a time Luther had thought that von Berlepsch himself was bearing the expense of his entertainment in that retreat, and that he was being more royally treated than he deserved.

Not only the material comforts with which he was surrounded appealed to him, however. Von Berlepsch was interested in Luther and in Luther’s work. He talked with him seriously on religious questions, and expressed a desire to have more information, particularly concerning the authority of the teachings of the Roman Church which had no direct warrant in Scripture.

To this desire of von Berlepsch we can trace the origin of our treatise, That the Doctrines of Men are to be Rejected. There is no dedication to von Berlepsch, however, and no reference to the months of companionship on the Wartburg. Luther returned from the Wartburg early in March, 1522, and on the 28th of March sent the first part of the treatise to Spalatin, with the request that it be forwarded to von Berlepsch. The second part, the Reply to Texts Quoted in Defense of the Doctrines of Men, was added in a second edition.

This was not the only writing forwarded to you Berlepsch in memory of the pleasant days spent on the Wartburg. Perhaps of even greater interest was the gift sent on September 25, 1522 — one of the first complete copies of the German New Testament.

Buchwald has called our treatise “a model of sound explanation of the Scriptures for the purpose of refuting error.” We must caution the reader, however, not to think of Luther’s occasional statements concerning the authority of Scripture as final. Luther is still largely upon medieval ground, accepting the premise of the Roman Church, and refuting the practice of the popes, priests and monks from the fundamental assumption of the authority of the Scriptures. The succeeding years, the controversies with the leaders of the peasants and with the heavenly prophets, led him to clearer views. Where in this treatise he wrote, “The same things which are found in the Books of Moses are found in the others. For the other books do no more than show how in the course of history the word of Moses was kept or not kept,” he was thinking of the one Gospel which he found everywhere in the Scriptures. But he distinguished carefully between the permanent and the temporary in the

Books of Moses and elsewhere, and speaks of “that which God has decreed” in the Old Testament as having “come to an end, and no longer binding the consciences of men” (p. 442).

That which is permanent is the Gospel, “for it is beyond question that all the Scriptures point to Christ alone” (p. 432). Probably the clearest statement of his views is found in a sermon preached in 1557: “The Word was given in many ways from the beginning. We must not only ask whether it is God’s Word, whether God spoke it, but much more, to whom He spoke it, whether it applies to you or to another.” “The false prophets rush in and say, ‘Dear people, this is God’s Word.’ It is true, and we cannot deny it; but we are not the people to whom He speaks” (Er1. Ed., 33, 16.)

In reading the treatise, therefore, it will be well to consider when it was written and for whom; and not to think of it as a final statement of Luther’s views on the authority of the Scriptures.

The treatise is found in the original German in Weimar Ed., X2 ; in Erlangen, 28, 318-343; in Berlin, 2, 289-314. W. A. LAMBERT . —SOUTH BETHLEHEM, PA.

THAT WE ARE TO REJECT THE DOCTRINES OF MEN:

TOGETHER WITH A REPLY TO THE TEXTS QUOTED IN DEFENCE OF THE DOCTRINES OF MEN

To all who read or hear this little book may God grant grace and understanding. Amen.

I, Martin Luther, have published this brief book for the comfort and saving of the poor consciences which are by the law of men held in bondage in monasteries and convents; that they may be able to arm and strengthen themselves with the Word of God, so as to be steadfast in the pains of death and other trials. But those who are overbold and unruly, who give no other evidence of being Christians except that they can eat eggs, meat and milk, stay away from confession and break the images, etc. , — these I warn that I do not wish my words to help them. For I regard them as the filthy people who defiled the camp of Israel, (Deuteronomy 23:12 f) although such cleanliness was enjoined upon the people that a man was required to go outside the camp to ease himself and to cover up with earth that which came from him. (Deuteronomy 14:18 Leviticus 11:19) We also must endure these unclean lapwings in our nest, until God teach them manners. This Christian liberty I would have preached only to poor, humble, captive consciences, so that poor children, nuns and monks, who would like to escape from their bondage may inform their consciences how they may do so with God’s approval and without danger, and use their freedom in an orderly and Christian way. May God grant His blessing.

Amen. That the doctrines of men are to be rejected: proof from the Scriptures.

Moses in Deuteronomy 4: 2 says, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it.”

But some one will say that Moses speaks only of his word; but to the books of Moses there have also been added many books of the prophets and the entire New Testament. I answer: True; but nothing new has been added: the same things that are found in the books of Moses are found in the others. For the other books do no more than show how in the course of history the word of Moses was kept or not kept. It is indeed stated in different words and the histories are different, but though out there is one and the same teaching. And here we can challenge them to point out anywhere in all the books added to the books of Moses a single word that is not found earlier in the books of Moses. For it is beyond question that all the Scriptures point to Christ alone. Now Christ says, in John 5:46, “Moses wrote of me.” Therefore everything that is in the other books is also in the books of Moses, and these are the original documents. Isaiah 29:13, which the Lord quotes in Matthew 15:8: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching the doctrines and commandments of men.”

Mark the word of Christ, Who calls it vain worship to serve God after the doctrines of men. For Christ is not drunken or a fool; on His word we must build in all things rather than on all angels and creatures. (Galatians 1:8) The same Christ in the same chapter, Matthew 15:11, says, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”

This saying must be well understood, for it is powerful and mightily overthrows all teaching, custom and manner of life that distinguishes between foods, and it sets all consciences free from all laws concerning food and drink; so that it is allowable to eat milk, butter, eggs, cheese and meat every day, whether it be Sunday or Friday, Lent or Advent; and no one needs to pay butter-money or buy butter-letters. For this word stands firm and does not deceive: “That which goeth into the mouth doth not defile a man.”

From this it follows, first, that it is a lie when they say that St. Peter instituted the fast-days and that the commandment of the Church has made it a mortal sin to eat eggs, butter, milk and meat on fast-days. (Fastdays) For neither St. Peter nor the Church institutes or teaches anything contrary to Christ. And if they did, we must not obey them. To do what they ask would indeed not be wicked; but it is wicked to make a necessity and a commandment of that which is free, and to pretend that something does defile and is sin of which Christ Himself says that it is no sin and does not defile.

It follows, secondly, that it is sheer devil’s knavery for the pope to sell letters and grant permission to eat butter, meat, etc.; for Christ in this word has already made it a matter of

liberty and has permitted it. (Dispensations) In the third place, it is an error and a lie to say that goldfasts, FB75 banfasts, FB76 and the fasts on the eve of Apostles' and saints' days must be observed and that their non observance is sin, because the Church has so commanded. For against everything of the kind stands this word of Christ: "That which goeth into the mouth doth not defile the man." Fasting should be free and voluntary, both as to the day and as to the food, forever.

Fourthly, the orders of St. Benedict, and of St. Bernard, the Carthusians, and all others which avoid the use of meat and other food because they hold that this is necessary and commanded and that not to do so would be sin, contradict Christ. For their law flatly contradicts the word of Christ and says: That which goeth into the mouth defileth. Then they must make Christ a liar when He says: "That which goeth into the mouth defileth not the man." Thus you see that this one saying of Christ mightily condemns all orders and spiritual rules. For if that which goeth into the mouth does not defile, how much less will that defile which is put on the body? whether it be cowl, coat, shirt, hose, shoes, cloak, whether green, yellow, blue, red, white, motley, or whatever one wish. And the same is true of places, whether churches, cells or the rooms of a house.

It follows that he who regards it a sin for a monk to go without the dress of his order, and would not leave it a matter of freedom, also makes Christ a liar and makes that a sin which Christ freed from sin, and says Yes! where Christ says No! What then are such monks but people who say to Christ's very face, Thou liest! there is sin in that which thou sayest is not sin. It will not help them to quote St. Bernard, St. Gregory, St. Francis and other saints. We must hear what Christ says, Who alone has been made our Teacher by the Father, when on Mount Tabor He said, Matthew 17:5, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." He did not say, Hear ye St. Bernard, St. Gregory, etc., but, Hear ye Him, Him, Him, my beloved Son. Who knows how far the saints sinned or did right in this matter? What they did, they did not of necessity nor by commandment.

Or if they did it as of necessity and by commandment, they erred, and we must not forsake Christ to follow them.

All this is confirmed by Christ in the words which follow in Matthew 15:11, "That which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. For out of the mouth, coming forth from the heart, come evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, etc. These defile a man."

Here we ask, If that alone is sin and defiles a man, which proceeds from the heart, as Christ here so strongly argues and decides, how then can butter, milk, eggs, cheese defile, which proceed not from the mouth nor from the heart, but come from the bellies of cows and of hens? Who has ever seen meat, tonsures, cowls, monasteries, hair-shirts coming out of men's mouths? Then it must be the cows that sin in giving us milk and butter, and in

bearing calves.

Therefore, all the laws of monks and of men concerning food, clothing and places and all things that are external, are not only blasphemy of God and lying and deceiving, but the buffoonery of apes. It is true, a man may have an inordinate desire to eat excessively and to dress extravagantly; but that proceeds from the heart, and may refer to fish as well as to meat, to gray homespun as well as to red velvet. In short, Christ does not lie when He says, "That which goeth into the mouth defileth not a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man."

But if it is true that neglect to do what men command neither defiles nor is sin, then on the other hand, the keeping and doing of men's commandments cannot make us clean nor give us merit; since only the opposite of sin and of the unclean is clean and gives merit. Therefore, all of the monastic life neither makes clean nor gives merit. And that is what the Lord Christ means when He says, Matthew 15:9, "In vain do they worship me with the commandments of men." Why 'in vain'? Because neglecting them is no sin and keeping them is no merit, but both are free.

They deceive themselves, therefore, and make a merit of that which is no merit, and are afraid of sinning where there is no sin, as Psalm 14:5, says, "There have they trembled for fear, where there was no fear." St. Paul in 1 Timothy 4:1-7 says: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their consciences seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables."

O how this thunders and storms against all the works, doctrines and orders of men. First, if they boast that they have derived their practice from the pope and from holy fathers, what will Christ's judgment be? Will He not say, "Paul, My Apostle, is My chosen vessel, as Luke writes, Acts 9:15: why then have you not ascribed greater authority to his word than to that of the pope and the fathers, of whom you do not know whose vessels they are?" How will they stand before Him?

Next, we ask them whether butter, eggs, meat, milk and all the food which they avoid on fast-days and in the orders, have not been created by God, and are not God's good creatures? Then it is certain that they are the men of whom Paul here says that they forbid the food which God has created and has given to believers to use. And they also forbid

marriage, so that they cannot escape: this passage fits them and is spoken of them. Let us see what Paul thinks of them and how he reproves them. 1. They have departed from the faith; for they could not have introduced such doctrines and works if they had not thought the doctrines and works would make them pious and save them. But such an opinion is of itself a sure sign that they have fallen away from the faith, since it is the work of faith alone to do that which they expect works to do, as has frequently been said. 2. They give heed to seducing spirits. He does not say, “to seducing men,” but “to seducing spirits”; and these are they who pretend to be spiritual and bear the name spiritual, and claim to be of the Spirit and in the Spirit. But since they are without faith it is impossible for them not to err in spiritual matters. Hence this is a fitting succession: they depart from the faith and follow after error in the spirit. 3. Their doctrines he calls “doctrines of devils.” This also must follow where faith and the true Spirit are wanting: the devil gives them the seducing spirit and leads them on with beautifully varnished doctrines and works, so that they think they are altogether spiritual. But since the doctrine does not originate in the Scriptures, it can be the doctrine of no one but the devil. 4. They are speakers of lies. For they at times quote even the Scriptures and the sayings of the fathers and wrest them to support their doctrines, as we see them do daily. But this is all false and a lie, since the Scriptures are altogether against them. 5. It is sheer hypocrisy. This is true and needs no comment. For all that they do is only appearance and show, concerned with external matters of food and clothes. 6. They have their conscience seared with a hot iron; that is, they have an unnatural conscience. For where there is no sin nor matter of conscience, they make sin and a matter of conscience, as was said above. Just as a scar caused by searing is an unnatural mark on the body. 7. They forbid to marry, by creating an estate in which there shall be no marriage, as we see in the case of both priests and monks. Wherefore, behold the judgment of God upon such doctrines and estates: that they are doctrines of devils, seducing doctrines, false doctrines, faithless doctrines, hypocritical doctrines. God help us! Who would remain in them when God Himself passes such judgment? What would it help you, if you had made a thousand vows and oaths on such doctrines? Nay, the stricter the vow, the more reason to break it, because it was made after the devil’s doctrines and against God.

But see how cleverly they worm themselves out and ward off this text from themselves, saying that it does not apply to them, but to the Tatianists, FB77 the heretics who condemned marriage altogether. Paul, however, does not speak here of those who condemn marriage, but of those who forbid it for the sake of appearing spiritual. Let us grant, however, that Paul speaks against the Tatianists. Then, if the pope does what the Tatianists did, why does it not apply to him as well? Be they Tatianists or the pope, this text speaks of those who forbid marriage. The words of Paul condemn the work, and make no distinction about the person who does it. He who forbids marriage is the devil’s disciple and apostle, as the words dearly say.

And since the pope does this, he must be the devil’s disciple, as must all his followers; otherwise, St. Paul must be a liar. 8. They forbid the food which God has created. Here,

again, you see that the doctrines of man are ascribed to the devil by God Himself through the mouth of Paul. What greater and more terrible thing would you wish to hear concerning the doctrines of men, than that they are a falling away from the faith, seducing, false, devilish, hypocritical? What will satisfy those whom this text does not satisfy? But if the doctrine that forbids certain kinds of food is devilish and unchristian, that which concerns clothes, tonsures, places and everything external will be just as devilish and unchristian.

But here again they worm themselves out, and say that St. Paul is speaking of the Manicheans. FB78 We are not asking about that. St. Paul speaks of the forbidding of meats, and, be they Manicheans or Tatianists, the pope and his followers forbid meats. Paul speaks of the work which we see that the pope does. Therefore we cannot save him from this text. If some other man arose today or tomorrow and forbade meats, would it not apply to him, even if he were no Manichean? If that way of interpreting Scripture were true, we might boldly do what Paul here forbids, and say, It does not apply to us, but to the ancient Manicheans. But that is not the way. Whether the pope with his monks and priests be not a Manichean, I do not discuss; but I do say, that in his teaching and works he contradicts the teaching of St.

Paul more than any Manichean. 9. They are unthankful. For God has created meats, says St. Paul, to be received with thanksgiving. And they refuse to receive them, that they may have no occasion to be thankful for God's goodness. The reason for which is, that they have no faith and do not know the truth. For Paul says, I Tim. 4:3, "To them which believe and to them which know the truth, they are given to be used with thanksgiving." But if they are unbelieving and do not know the truth, as St. Paul here says they are, they are beyond question heathen, non-Christians, blind and foolish. And this, I suppose, they regard as praise of the pope, priests and monks! 10. Paul rebukes them as wicked, harmful preachers; for he says that Timothy shall be a good preacher, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, if he will put the brethren in remembrance of these things. It follows that they who teach the contrary must be wicked preachers and be nourished with words of unbelief and of wicked doctrines. 11. He calls such doctrines profane and old wives' fables. Is not that foolish talk? He says that the great doctors busy themselves with fables such as old wives chatter about behind the stove, and calls them profane, unchristian and unholy idle talk, although the doctors claim that they are the very essence of holiness!

Who has ever heard the doctrines of men so terribly decried in every way? that they are apostate, unbelieving, unchristian, heathen, seducing, devilish, false, hypocritical, searing the conscience, unthankful, that they dishonor God and His creature and are harmful fables and old wives' chatter. Let him who can, flee from beneath this judgment of God. St. Paul in Colossians 2:16 and the following verses says: "Let no man burden you in meat or in drink or in respect of certain days which are holy days, or days of the new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is in Christ. Let no one seduce you who follows his own will in the humility and religion of angels, of whom he has never seen even

one, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and does not hold fast the Head, from which all the body, by joints and bands, is supplied with nourishment and is knit together, and so groweth unto a stature given of God. If then you be dead with Christ from the elements of this world, why do you burden yourselves with ordinances as if you were alive? Ordinances which say, This thou shalt not touch, this thou shalt not eat or drink, this thou shalt not put on (which all perish in the using), according to the commandments and doctrines of men, who have a show of wisdom because of their self-chosen spirituality and humility, and because they do not spare the body and do not supply its needs.”

Is St. Paul here also speaking of the Manicheans or Tatianists? Or can we find excuse here for the papists? He speaks against those who take captive the consciences of men with the doctrines of men and make matters of conscience of food, drink, clothes, days and everything that is external.

And it cannot be denied that the pope, the chapters and monasteries with their rules and statutes do this when they forbid the eating of meat, eggs and butter, and the wearing of ordinary clothes such as other people wear.

And here stands St. Paul, and says: 1. “Let no man burden your consciences, or judge or condemn you in respect of food, drink, clothes or days.” What does this mean if not this:

Be not priests nor monks, nor in any way keep the pope’s laws; and believe him not when he says that a certain thing is sin or a matter of conscience.

See, here God through Paul commands us to despise the laws of the pope and of the monasteries, and to keep them free, so that they do not take captive the conscience. That is as much as to say, Do not become monks or priests, and let him who has become monk or priest turn back, or else retain his position as a matter of freedom without constraint of conscience.

And although Paul wrote this of the Jews, who did such things according to the Law (for he says in Colossians 2:17, that they have the shadow and type of things to come, but that the body itself is in Christ), yet it holds much more against the decrees of the pope and of the monks. For if that which God has decreed comes to an end and shall no longer bind the consciences of men, how much more shall men neither decree nor keep anything that would bind the conscience? And farther on more will be said of the laws of mere men, for 2. He says, “Let no one seduce you or lead you toward the prize in bypaths.”

What does this mean but to lead men to works and away from faith, which alone is the one right road by which to gain the prize of salvation, to strive toward heaven by other ways, and to claim that this is the way to gain the prize? And this is what the orders and the pope’s doctrines do. And what are the ways they propose? Listen: 3. He says, “In selfwilled

humility and the religion of angels.” What words could better fit the orders? Is it not true that the pope and all of them prattle much of their obedience, which is said to be the noblest virtue, that is, the precious spiritual humility of the papists? But who has commanded this humility? They themselves have invented it and sought it out that they might seduce themselves. For with it they have withdrawn themselves from the common humility and obedience which God has commanded, namely, that every one shall humble himself and be subject to his neighbor. But they are subject to no man on earth, and have withdrawn themselves entirely; they have made an obedience and a humility of their own after their statutes. Yet they claim that their obedience is superhuman, perfect and, as it were, angelic, although there are no more disobedient and less humble people on earth than they are.

In the same way they also have their vows of chastity and poverty. They do not work like other people but, like the angels in heaven, they praise and worship God day and night; in short, their life is heavenly, although nowhere on earth can you find more horrible unchastity, greater wealth, less devotional hearts, or more hardened people than in the spiritual estate, as every one knows. Yet they seduce all the world from the true way to the by-path with their self-willed, beautiful, spiritual and angelic life. All this, it seems to me, is not spoken of the Jews nor of the Manicheans, but of the papists; the works prove it. 4. He says, “He walks in such religion and in that which he has never seen.” This is the very worst feature of the doctrines of men and the life built upon them, that they are without foundation and without warrant in the Scriptures, and that men cannot know whether what they do is good or wicked. For all their life is an uncertain venture. If you ask them whether they are certain that what they are and do is pleasing to God, they say, they do not know, they must take the chances: “the end will show us.” And this is all they can say, for they have no faith, and faith alone makes us certain that all that we are is well-pleasing to God, not because of our merit, but because of His mercy. Thus all their humility, obedience and all of their religion is, at the very best, uncertain and in vain. 5. “Vainly they puff themselves up,” that is, they have no reason to do so.

For although their practices are uncertain, unbelieving and altogether damnable, yet they make bold to puff themselves up and to claim that they have the best and the only true way, so that in comparison with theirs every other manner of living stinks and is nothing at all. But this puffed-up carnal mind of theirs they neither see nor feel, so great is their angelic humility and obedience! O, the fruit of the doctrines of men! 6. “They do not hold fast the Head,” which is Christ. For the doctrines of men and Christ cannot agree; one must destroy the other. If the conscience finds comfort in Christ, the comfort derived from works and doctrines must fall; if it finds comfort in works, Christ must fall. The heart cannot build upon a twofold foundation; one must be forsaken. Now we see that all the comfort of the papists rests upon their practices; for if it did not rest upon them, they would not esteem them and would give them up, or else they would use them as matters of freedom, how and when they pleased.

If there were no other misfortune connected with the doctrines of men, this were of itself all too great — that for their sake Christ must be forsaken, the Head must be lost, and the heart must build on such an abomination.

For this reason St. Peter calls the orders abominable and damnable heresies, which deny Christ, when he says, in 2 Peter 2:1, “There shall arise among you false teachers, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, and deny the Lord that bought them.” 7. It is clear enough that he means our spiritual estate when he says, “If ye be dead with Christ, why do ye burden your consciences with ordinances, such as: This thou shalt not touch, this thou shalt not eat, this thou shalt not wear, etc.” Who can here deny that God through St. Paul forbids us to teach and to hear all doctrines of men, in so far as they constrain the conscience? Who then can with a good conscience be a monk or a priest, or be subject to the pope? They must confess that their consciences are taken captive with such laws. Thus thou seest what a mighty saying this is against all doctrines of men. It is dreadful to hear that they forsake Christ the Head, deny the faith and so must needs become heathen, and yet think their holiness upholds the world. 6.

Paul, in Galatians 1:8f., says: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. FB79 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

In these words you hear a judgment of God against the pope and all doctrines of men, which says that they are under the ban. And this ban is not like the pope’s ban; it is eternal and separates a man from God, from Christ, from all salvation and from everything that is good, and makes him the companion of devils. O what a terrible judgment is this! Look now, whether the pope, priests and monks do not proclaim another and a different doctrine than that taught by Christ and His Apostles. We said above that Christ teaches, “What goeth into the mouth doth not defile a man.” Contrary to this and beyond it the pope, priests and monks say, “Thou liest, Christ, in so saying; for the eating of meat defiles a Carthusian and condemns him; and the same is true of the other orders.” Is not this striking Christ on the mouth, calling Him a liar and blaspheming Him, and teaching other doctrines than He taught? Therefore it is a just judgment, that they in their great holiness are condemned like blasphemers of God with an eternal ban. 7.

Paul, in Titus 1:14, says: “Teach them not to give heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn them from the truth.”

This is a strong command, that we are not at all to regard the commandments of men. Is not this clear enough? And Paul gives his reason: they turn men from the truth, he says. For as has been said above, the heart cannot trust in Christ and at the same time in the doctrines or the works of men. Therefore, as soon as a man turns to the doctrines of men he turns away

from the truth, and does not regard it. On the other hand, he who finds his comfort in Christ cannot regard the commandments and the works of men. Look now, whose ban you should fear most! The pope and his followers cast you far beyond hell if you do not heed their commandments, and Christ commands you not to heed them on pain of His ban. Consider whom you wish to obey. 8. 2 Peter 2:1-3: "There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of, and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you."

So then, the orders and monastic houses are damnable heresies. Why?

Because they deny Christ, and blaspheme the way of faith. How? Christ says, there is no sin and no righteousness in eating, drinking, clothes, places and works of men; this they condemn, and teach and live the opposite, namely, that sin and righteousness are in these things. Hence Christ must be a liar, He must be denied and blasphemed together with His teaching and faith. And they make use of feigned words, and make much of their obedience, chastity and worship; but only through covetousness, that they may make merchandise of us, until they have brought all the wealth of the world into their possession, on the ground that they are the people who by their worship would help every man to heaven. For this reason they are and remain damnable and blasphemous heresies. 9.

Christ says, in Matthew 24:23 ff.: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christ's and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before, Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not."

Tell me, how can a monk be saved? He binds his salvation to a place and says, "Here I find Christ; if I did not remain here, I should be lost." But Christ says, "No, I am not here." Who will reconcile these two? Therefore, it is clear from this word of Christ that all doctrines which bind the conscience to places are contrary to Christ. And if He does not allow the conscience to be bound to places, neither does He allow it to be bound to meats, clothes, postures or anything that is external. There is no doubt then that this passage speaks of the pope and his clergy, and that Christ Himself releases and sets free all priests and monks, in that He condemns all orders and monasteries and says, "Believe not, go not out," etc.

He says the same thing also in Luke 17:20 f.: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, and men shall not say, Lo here! or, Lo there!

For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

Is not this also clear enough? The doctrines of men can command nothing but external

things; and since the kingdom of God is not external, both teachers and disciples must needs miss the kingdom and go astray. Nor will it help them to say that the holy fathers instituted the orders. For Christ has already destroyed this argument, since He says, that the very elect might be misled, that is, they will err, but not remain in their error. How else would it be an exceeding great error, if the elect were not misled? Let the teaching and the practice of the saints be what it will, the words of Christ are certain and clear. Him we must follow, and not the saints, whose teaching and works are uncertain. What He says stands firm, "The kingdom of God is among you, and not at a distance, either here or there." Solomon, in Proverbs 30:5 f., says: "Every word of God is purified: and is a shield unto all them that put their trust in it. Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

With this I will end for the present; for there is much more in the prophets, especially in Jeremiah, of which I have written in the treatise on Confession. Here then Solomon concludes that he is a liar who adds aught to the words of God; for the Word of God alone is to teach us, as Christ says, Matthew 23:8, "Be ye not called masters. One Master is in you, even Christ." Amen.

A REPLY TO TEXTS QUOTED IN DEFENCE OF THE DOCTRINES OF MEN

The first is Luke 10:16, where Christ says, "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me." He spoke similar words in Matthew 10:40, and in John 13:20. Here, they claim, Christ demands of us that we accept their man-made laws.

I reply: That is not true. For immediately before speaking these words, Christ says, "Go and say, the kingdom of God is at hand." (Luke 10:9 Matthew 10:7) With these words Christ stops the mouths of all the teachers of the doctrines of men, and commands the apostles what they are to teach, and Himself puts the words in their mouth, saying that they shall preach the kingdom of God. Now he who does not preach the kingdom of God is not sent by Christ, and him these words do not concern. Much rather do these words demand of us that we hear not the doctrines of men.

Now to preach of the kingdom of God is nothing else than to preach the Gospel, in which the faith of Christ is taught, by which alone God dwells and rules in us. But the doctrines of men do not preach about faith, but about eating, clothing, times, places, persons and about purely external things which do not profit the soul.

Behold how honestly the pious shepherds and faithful teachers have dealt with the poor common people. This text, "Who hears you, hears me," they have in a masterly fashion torn out of its context and have terrified us with it, until they have made us subject to themselves. But what precedes, "Preach the kingdom of God," they have taken good care not to mention, and have bravely leaped over it, that they might by no means be compelled

to preach nothing but the Gospel. The noble, and most excellent teachers!

We ought to thank them for it!

In Mark, the last chapter, we read that He sent out the disciples to preach. (Mark 16:15) Let us hear what command He gives them, and how He sets a limit to their teaching and bridles their tongues, saying, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth, shall be saved,” etc., Mark 16:15. He does not say, Go and preach what you will, or what you think to be good; but He puts His own word into their mouth, and bids them preach the Gospel.

In Matthew, the last chapter, He says, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptise them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; and teach them to observe all things which I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19) Here, again, He does not say, Teach them to observe what you devise, but what I have commanded you. Therefore the pope and his bishops and teachers must be wolves and the apostles of the devil; it cannot be otherwise, for they teach not the commands of Christ, but their own words.

So also in Matthew 25:15, in the parable of the three servants, the Lord points out that the householder bade the servants trade not with their own property, but with his, and gave the first five talents, the second two and the third one. Our second text is Matthew 23:2 f., where the Lord says, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.”

Here, here, they say, we have authority to teach what we think to be right.

I answer: If that is what Christ means, then we are in a sorry plight. Every pope might then create more new laws, until the world could no longer contain all the laws. But they quote this text as they quote the first. What do the words “sit in Moses’ seat” mean? Let us ask, what did Moses teach?

And if he still sat in his seat today, what would he teach? Beyond a doubt, nothing but what he taught of old, namely, the commandments and the word of God. He never yet spoke the doctrines of men, but what God commanded him to speak, as almost every chapter of his shows. It follows, then, that he who teaches something else than Moses teaches, does not sit in Moses’ seat. For the Lord calls it Moses’ seat, because from it the doctrines of Moses should be read and taught. The same meaning is contained in the words which follow, in which the Lord says, “But do not ye after their works, for they say, and do not; for they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.” (Matthew 23:3 f.)

See, here He reproves their works, because they add many laws to the doctrines of Moses

and lay them on the people, but themselves do not touch them. And afterward He says, in verse 13, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind; for whether is greater? the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?” (Matthew 23:13,16f.) Is it not clear that Christ here condemns their doctrines of men? He can, therefore, not have confirmed them by speaking of sitting in Moses’ seat; else He would have contradicted Himself. Therefore Moses’ seat must mean no more than the Law of Moses, and the sitting in it no more than the preaching of the Law of Moses.

This is what Moses himself said of his seat and doctrine, Deuteronomy 4:2, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you.” And in Deuteronomy 12:32, “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto nor diminish from it.” These doctrines they were required to teach in Moses’ seat; therefore Moses’ seat cannot endure any doctrines of men.

St. Augustine is quoted as having written in the Book against the Letter of the Manichean, FB81 “I would not believe the Gospel if I did not believe the Church.”

Here you see, they say, we are to believe the Church more than the Gospel.

I answer: Even if Augustine had used those words, who gave him authority, that we must believe what he says? What Scripture does he quote to prove the statement? What if he erred here, as we know that he frequently did, as did all the fathers? Should one single sentence of Augustine be so mighty as to refute all the texts quoted above? That is not what God wills; St. Augustine must yield to them.

Further, if that were St. Augustine’s meaning, he would contradict himself; for in very many places he exalts the Holy Scriptures above the opinions of all teachers, above the decrees of all councils and churches, and will have men judge of him and of the teachings of all men according to the Scriptures. Why then do the faithful shepherds pass by those sayings of St.

Augustine, plain and clear as they are, and light on this lonely one, which is so obscure and sounds so unlike Augustine as we know him from all his writings? It can only be because they want to bolster up their tyranny with idle, empty words.

Furthermore, they are deceivers, in that they not only ascribe to St.

Augustine an opinion he did not hold, but they also falsify and pervert his words. For St. Augustine’s words really are, “I would not have believed the Gospel if the authority of the whole Church had not moved me.”

Augustine speaks of the whole Church, and says that throughout the world it with one

consent preaches the Gospel and not the Letter of the Manicheans; and this unanimous authority of the Church moves him to consider it the true Gospel. But our tyrants apply this name of the Church to themselves, as if the laymen and the common people were not also Christians. And what they teach they want men to consider as the teaching of the Christian Church, although, they are a minority, and we, who are universal Christendom, should also be consulted about what is to be taught in the name of universal Christendom. See, so cleverly do they quote the words of St. Augustine: what he says of the Church throughout all the world, they would have us understand of the Roman See.

But how does it follow from this saying that the doctrines of men are also to be observed? What doctrine of men has ever been devised that has been accepted and preached by all of the universal Church throughout the world? Not one; the Gospel alone is accepted by all Christians everywhere.

But then we must not understand St. Augustine to say that he would not believe the Gospel unless he were moved thereto by the authority of the whole Church. For that were false and unchristian. Every man must believe only because it is God's Word, and because he is convinced in his heart that it is true, although an angel from heaven and all the world preached the contrary. His meaning is rather, as he himself says, that he finds the Gospel nowhere except in the Church, and that this external proof can be given heretics that their doctrine is not right, but that that is right which all the world has with one accord accepted. For the eunuch in Acts 8:37, believed on the Gospel as preached by Philip, although he did not know whether many or few believed on it. So also Abraham believed the promise of God all by himself, when no man knew of it, Romans 4:18. And Mary, Luke 1:38, believed the message of Gabriel by herself, and there was no one on earth who believed with her. In this way Augustine also had to believe, and all the saints, and we too, every one for himself alone.

For this reason St. Augustine's words cannot bear the interpretation they put upon them; but they must be understood of the external proof of faith, by which heretics are refuted and the weak strengthened in faith, when they see that all the world preaches and regards as Gospel that which they believe. And if this meaning cannot be found in St. Augustine's words, it is better to reject the words; for they are contrary to the Scriptures and to all experience if they have that other meaning.

Finally, when they are refuted with Scripture so that they cannot escape, they begin to blaspheme God and say, "But St. Matthew, Paul and Peter also were men; therefore what they teach is also the doctrine of men. And if their doctrine is to be observed, let the pope's doctrine be observed as well!" Such blasphemy is now being uttered even by some princes and bishops, who count themselves wise. When you hear such utterly hardened and blinded blasphemers, turn away from them or stop your ears; they are not worthy that one should talk with them. If that argument were to hold, then Moses also was a man, and all the

prophets were men. Then let us go our way, and believe nothing at all, but regard everything as the doctrine of men, and follow our fancy.

But if you will talk with them, do so, and say, Well, let St. Paul or Matthew be the doctrine of men; then we ask, Whence comes their authority? How will they prove that they have authority to teach and to be bishops? Or how shall we know where the Church is? If they say that St.

Matthew has so asserted in Matthew 16:19, or St. Paul in some place or other, do you say, But that does not hold: they are the doctrines of men, as you say; you must have God's Word to confirm you. And then you will find that these hardened blasphemers put themselves to shame and confusion with their own folly. They cannot even distinguish between a man who speaks for himself and one through whom God speaks. The words of the Apostles were commanded them by God, and confirmed and proved by great miracles, such as were never done for the doctrines of men. And if they are certain in themselves, and will prove it to us, that God has commanded them to teach as they do, we will believe them as we believe the Apostles. If it is uncertain whether the words of the Apostles are of God, who will give us certainty that their doctrines of men are of God? O furor et amentia his saeculis digna! FB82 But we do not condemn the doctrines of men because they are the doctrines of men, for we would gladly endure them, but because they are contrary to the Gospel and to the Scriptures. The Scriptures set the consciences of men free, and forbid that they be taken captive with the doctrines of men. The doctrines of men take captive the conscience. This conflict between the Scriptures and the doctrines of men we cannot reconcile. Hence, because these two forms of doctrine contradict one another, we allow even young children to judge here whether we are to give up the Scriptures, in which the one Word of God is taught from the beginning of the world, or the doctrines of men which were newly devised yesterday and change daily? And we hope that every one will agree in the decision that the doctrines of men must be forsaken and the Scriptures retained. For they cannot be reconciled, but are by nature opposed to one another, like fire and water, like heaven and earth; As Isaiah 55:8 f. says: "As the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways." Now he who walks on the earth cannot at the same time walk in heaven, and he who walks in heaven cannot walk on the earth.

Therefore we request the papists that they first reconcile their doctrines with the Scriptures. If they accomplish that, we will observe their doctrines. But that they will not do before the Holy Spirit has become a liar. Therefore we say again, The doctrines of men we censure not because they are spoken by men, but because they are lies and blasphemies against the Scriptures. And the Scriptures, although they also were written by men, are not of men nor from men, but from God. Now since Scriptures and the doctrines of men are contrary the one to the other, one must lie and the other be true. Let us see to which of the two they themselves will ascribe the lie. Let this suffice.