



EDITED BY WILLIAM EDGAR & K. SCOTT OLIPHINT

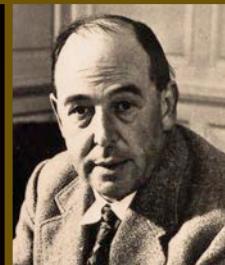
CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

PAST & PRESENT

A PRIMARY SOURCE READER



VOLUME 2 :: FROM 1500



Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader (Volume 2, From 1500)

Copyright © 2011 by William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Amy Bristow

Cover photo: National Portrait Gallery and Bridgeman Art Library

Interior design and typesetting: Lakeside Design Plus

First printing 2011

Printed in the United States of America

The volume editors' Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®*), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-58134-907-8

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-3169-9

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-3167-5

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-3168-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Christian apologetics past and present : a primary source reader / William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, eds.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-58134-906-1 (hc)

1. Apologetics—History—Sources. I. Edgar, William, 1944– II. Oliphint, K. Scott, 1955–

III. Title. BT1109.C57 2009

239—dc22

2008050655

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

TS	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11
14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Contents

Introduction to Volume 2	9
--------------------------	---

Part 1. The Reformation, Post-Reformation (Protestant), and Catholic Reformation

<i>Part 1 Introduction</i>	13
1. Martin Luther	19
2. John Calvin	37
3. Robert Bellarmine	107
4. John Owen	131
5. Follow-Up	165

Part 2. Modernity and the Challenge of Reason

<i>Part 2 Introduction</i>	169
6. Blaise Pascal	173
7. Joseph Butler	195
8. Jonathan Edwards	219
9. William Paley	239
10. Friedrich Schleiermacher	265
11. Follow-Up	299

Part 3. The Global Era: Christian Faith and a Changing World

<i>Part 3 Introduction</i>	305
12. Søren Kierkegaard	313
13. Abraham Kuyper	331
14. James Orr	361
15. Benjamin B. Warfield	391
16. G. K. Chesterton	405

17. J. Gresham Machen	435
18. Cornelius Van Til	453
19. C. S. Lewis	479
20. Hans Urs von Balthasar	491
21. Lesslie Newbigin	519
22. Francis A. Schaeffer	545
23. Follow-Up	577

Part 4. Issues Today and Tomorrow

<i>Part 4 Introduction</i>	581
----------------------------	-----

24. Alvin Plantinga	585
25. Merold Westphal	621
26. Os Guinness	631
27. Jean-Luc Marion	657
28. William Lane Craig	691
29. Francis Collins	709
30. Follow-Up	719

General Index	723
---------------	-----

Scripture Index	739
-----------------	-----

Introduction to Volume 2

In the first volume of *Christian Apologetics Past and Present* we presented primary texts from the close of the apostolic age until the eve of the Reformation. Here we move from the Reformation to the present age. Because of the limitations of space, we could only choose a handful of texts from among the vast numbers available. Further, the cost of obtaining permission for the many publications not yet in the public domain makes republishing all of them prohibitive. As a compromise we have added to the fuller texts a series of “follow-up” sections, briefly describing some of the significant apologists we had to omit, with a list of their major writings for further study. We hope this will reassure those who will rightly wonder why we made certain selections, or why their favorite apologist was not always featured!

As in volume 1, we provide an introduction to each major historical section, and then each chapter introduces its featured author, highlighting any significant fact bearing on the person and the text. The texts themselves are virtually untouched, including now-unconventional punctuation, though quotation marks have been Americanized, and the ligatures *æ* and *œ* are rendered *ae* and *oe* to match modern typography. Headings in readings are modified in form for greater uniformity, but not in content. Diagnostic questions follow each text, to prompt reflection or discussion.

Like the first volume, this one can be used in a variety of ways. It is ideal for classes on the history of apologetics. It can also work well for discussion groups. But we trust it will also be used by individuals who need resources for their own work.

We want once again to express our thanks to Jeffrey Waddington for his willingness to gather all of the material and keep it in one format, and also for his brilliant spade work in tracking down texts and obtaining permissions from the publishers. We especially want to thank our wonderful editors at Crossway for their careful, patient guidance through the many choices we had to make, particularly

because of the often unwieldy body of material we are presenting. Thom Notaro's concern for both details and the whole is deeply appreciated.

We offer these pages with a due sense of humility, knowing how much more could have been done. But we also offer them with gratitude, knowing that the authors represented here surround us as "a great cloud of witnesses," whose work deserves to be better known by those who have come after them.

PART ONE

The Reformation, Post-Reformation (Protestant), and Catholic Reformation

Part 1 Introduction

We enter the very early years of the modern era. The so-called Middle Ages were on the wane.¹ Although it is oversimple to do so, we may speak of the emergence of two broad, overlapping movements: the Renaissance and the Reformation.

First, a new cultural mode emerged that would later be characterized as the Renaissance. It began much earlier than the Reformation, lasting roughly from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries. The great poet Petrarch (1304–1374) was perhaps the first to reject the traditional way of organizing history and to call the previous era “medieval.” Indeed, it became common currency to speak of the Middle Ages somewhat pejoratively as a term for an intermediate period between the glorious classical past of Greek and Roman antiquity and the “modern” period in which the ancients were rediscovered and the authoritarianism of the church could be challenged. Petrarch so admired the contemporary Italian poet Dante that he deemed his work to be a *renascita*, a “rebirth” of poetry as good as or better than anything written in classical times.² The word conveys the idea that something new was happening in Europe, built on the foundation of antiquity, thus a new birth.

At the heart of the Renaissance spirit was humanism. A new respect for the humanities had spread across Europe. Humanism (not to be confused with the derogatory modern sense of that term) was a new form of learning that critically reexamined basic sources for education, society, and the church. Humanists wanted a return to the sources (*ad fontes*), and they looked for a rebirth of classical

1. Although controversial, Johan Huizinga’s volume *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1954) indicates the number of ways in which spiritual and cultural trends were on the decline in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Europe. He finds there that faith becomes superstition, beauty becomes ostentation, and courtly love becomes formalist. Style replaces substance. In theology confidence in God is diminished.

2. The word *Renaissance* was coined in the nineteenth century by French scholars. See J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

languages, of Greek rhetoric, of science and art. Many reasons lay behind the desire to look again at such fundamental issues as philosophy, learning, the arts, technology, and so forth. One reason is no doubt the devastating effects of the plague. Known as the Black Death, this pandemic was perhaps the worst in all recorded history. Some seventy-five million people died worldwide, up to fifty million of them in Europe. It began in the fourteenth century but was not finally eradicated until the seventeenth.³ This phenomenon had the double effect of leading people to doubt the authority of the church and to search for new, more serious ways to live before God. In addition, civic humanism looked to ancient societies in order to learn how social organization might better generate the good. There was considerable incentive to rethink political life, particularly because there was such confusion at the time.

The second great movement, the Protestant Reformation, was at the heart of a renewal in apologetics. By the fifteenth century both decadence and some reforms were in evidence. Corruption was widespread in the church of the late Middle Ages. Bishops collected large revenues from their dioceses but rarely made pastoral visits to them. Many priests were uneducated, barely able to say the Mass, let alone understand it. When they did understand it, the Latin religious services often remained unintelligible to the faithful. Indeed, there was a great distance between clergy and laity.

Into this dark situation a number of individuals and movements came to reform the church. New religious orders were instituted, such as the Dominicans, who specialized in preaching, or the Brethren of the Common Life, who featured the “modern devotion,” cultivating the simple imitation of Christ. Remarkable figures such as John Wycliffe (ca. 1329–1384) in England and Jan Hus (ca. 1372–1415) stressed a return to the Bible, and a faith based on the love of Christ rather than conformity to rituals.

But none of these developments would have the enduring power of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. This defining moment not only for the church but also for the emergence of modern Europe was certainly connected to the Renaissance. Humanism itself inspired religious renewal. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) was the greatest humanist of the era. Among other accomplishments, he produced critical editions of various early Christian texts, including the Latin version of the New Testament (1516). In so doing he dismantled the monumental achievement of Jerome, whose Latin Vulgate and surrounding commentaries had been the standard for more than a thousand years. Though Erasmus would never formally embrace the Reformation, he contributed to it in many ways. For example, in Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist exhorts his

3. See David Herlihy and Samuel K. Cohn Jr., *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Judean listeners with the word *metanoeite*, which the Vulgate had translated in terms of *doing penance*. Erasmus translated it *resipiscite*, which is closer to “repent.” Likewise, he pointed out the paucity of references to Mary in the Bible. For the 1519 edition of his text, Erasmus revised the Latin translation of Gabriel’s greeting to “gracious Mary,” rather than “Mary full of grace,” a change that made her less available as the repository for merit or good works held up in popular piety. Luther, Calvin, and most of the other Reformers were deeply influenced by Erasmus and his type of humanism.⁴

The rise of the city was also important. The late medieval city was known as the “foyer of modernity.”⁵ The German Reformation is not conceivable without the economic improvements, empowerment of the laity, and secularity of the city, which was decreasingly under the direct control of the church. In the towns the individual began to have unprecedented responsibility. Social ties were less hierarchical and more horizontal. This had both negative and positive results. There was considerable disorientation because the traditional rules were more difficult to apply. There was anxiety and confusion. At the same time people were beginning to sense their importance and their accountability to God and to society in unprecedented ways.

Finally, the printing press played a crucial role in disseminating the ideas of the Reformation. By the sixteenth century the number of universities in Europe had risen from twenty to seventy. Not only was there greater education, but literacy was on the rise as well. The invention of the printing press was nothing less than a revolution because it enabled educated people and readers to discover the new ideas about religion. Martin Luther called print technology a gift from God. By the time he died (1546), over 3,400 editions of the Bible had appeared in High German and 430 in Low German. As is well known, Luther’s work contributed to the standardization of the German language and culture.

The Reformers thought not that they were innovating but rather that they were being faithful to the true foundation. Protestant sympathizer Jeanne d’Albret, in a famous quip to Cardinal Armagnac, affirmed, “I am not planting a new religion but restoring an old one.” Notably, the Reformers were returning to the authority of Scripture, even when its teaching appeared to contradict church tradition. The Reformation also stressed the accountability of the individual to God, along with the liberating grace of the gospel to everyone who believes. Three central convictions set off the Reformation from even the finest of the previous efforts at reform.

4. Of course, Luther was disappointed that Erasmus would not join the Protestant movement, and they also disagreed about free will. Yet Luther admired Erasmus no end and made use of his New Testament translation for his own German Bible.

5. Jacques Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l’Au-delà* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1980), 430.

First, God is at the center of all of life. Previously it was thought that if one were faithful to church life and were generally decent, then paradise would be assured. Now putting God first—not only his requirements, but his love—was fundamental. Where do we learn about this God? Primarily in the Scriptures. Thus the authority of the Bible took on a radically new importance.

Second, one can have God at the center only if one is right with him. The Reformers stressed the gravity of sin but also the power of the gospel to save. Salvation is the free gift of Christ's righteousness, rather than a process of improvement. Again, the knowledge of that way to God is through the Scriptures, which declares us justified before God when we believe.

Third, the Reformers understood Christ in a different way from their late-medieval forebears. Previously Christ was thought of as a terrifying judge, austere and unapproachable. One of the reasons Mary was elevated to such prominence is that she was more like a mother, more approachable. The Reformers understood Christ as coming to earth full of grace, "clothed in the gospel." He was not only God but our elder brother.

These Reformation principles resonated with many people who had been confused about the most basic elements of the Christian religion. But the Reformation could not have occurred without the extraordinary work of many gifted leaders. In addition to Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, a host of other figures, men and women, rose to greet the new ideas and spread them.⁶ In most countries where the Reformation took a foothold there was opposition, some of it fierce. In France, despite the initial attraction to the Huguenots (the name given to Protestants there) by many in the population, and despite numerous attempts at peace and concord, the Reformation was rejected, and by the eighteenth century fierce persecutions forced tens of thousands to flee. Instead of promoting the cause of biblical religion, the French Enlightenment with its rationalistic skepticism would become a most influential force throughout Europe.

In England the Reformation took root but would struggle to define how far the cleansing from Rome could go. Scotland became Reformed under the leadership of the fiery John Knox. In the Netherlands, despite great opposition from the so-called Holy Roman Empire, the Protestant Reformation in its Calvinist expression gained much ground.

6. Because the Protestant Reformation is one of the most richly mined fields in historical studies, there are many excellent accounts of it. Carter Lindberg's *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) presents a thorough and balanced account of the various wings of the Reformation, from Germany to France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. Diarmaid MacCulloch's *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2003) places the Reformation in the context of European social and cultural issues. For a nice, succinct presentation of the Reformation and its relevance for today, see Carl R. Trueman, *Reformation: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Dundas, ON: Joshua, 2000). Countless studies on different aspects and different personages exist as well.

It must not be imagined that throughout all of these changes the Roman Catholic Church was quiescent. Partly in reply to Protestants, and partly because of its own desire for reform, the Church of Rome made strong efforts at its own overhaul. We shall label this movement—often known as the Counter-Reformation—the Catholic Reformation, especially since one cannot reduce it merely to reactions to Protestantism. To be sure, many attempts were made to condemn various Reformers and their writings. But also, various movements came into prominence seeking to redefine the Catholic Church and its spirituality. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) founded the Society of Jesus, known as the Jesuits. His followers were known for their respect for education and missions. The Council of Trent met from 1545 to 1563. Though it was opposed to doctrines such as the Protestant view of justification by faith alone and the supremacy of the Scriptures over conscience, yet it also contained elements of reformation, for example in worship and church discipline.

Again, a significant amount of apologetics during this time concerned the polemics between Protestants and Catholics. On the Protestant side, it was necessary to defend the Reformed religion against its detractors, especially those who thought it was a departure from the true church. One thinks of Luther's famous statement at the imperial Diet of Worms in 1521: "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."⁷ Or think of John Calvin's "Address to King Francis I," the preface to the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in which he defends the evangelical believers before the king against the charge of heresy.

Similarly, the Roman Catholic polemicists defended the papacy and the role of tradition against the Protestant approach. At the same time, the literature is broader than attacks against Protestantism. It includes philosophical treatises and devotional works. A crucial figure was Francisco Suárez (1548–1617). He did write polemical works against the Protestants,⁸ but he is best remembered for his large output on metaphysical and theological subjects, where he argues for moderate realism.⁹ Possibly the most powerful representative of Catholic apologetics was Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), the Italian Jesuit whose *Disputations concerning the Controversies of the Christian Faith against the Heretics of This Age* was as much a systematization of Catholic theology as it was an orderly account

7. "Speech at the Diet of Worms" (1521), in Josiah Hotchkiss Gilbert, *Dictionary of Burning Words of Brilliant Writers* (New York: Wilbur B. Ketcham, 1895), 186.

8. See, for example, his *Defensio catholicae fidei contra anglicanae sectae errors* (1613). It was a treatise dedicated to the princes of Europe, arguing against the oath of allegiance required by James I of his subjects.

9. See his *Disputationes metaphysicae* (1597).

of the polemics of the past sixty years.¹⁰ But he too contributed a good deal to positive, devotional literature. Indeed, the text we have chosen to present here is not a treatise against Protestantism, but a meditation on piety.

Accordingly, although a good deal of sixteenth-century apologetics involved polemics between the two major communions, Roman Catholic and Protestant (the Orthodox world was considerably separate), some traditional apologetics was done as well. In France, on the Protestant side, Philippe de Mornay (1549–1623) explained his method of reaching out to pagans and Jews in *Truth of the Christian Religion* (1581). The Roman Catholic Pierre Charron (1541–1603) defended the existence of God from the self-refuting nature of atheism, the bankruptcy of non-Christian religions, and the inability of Protestants to reason successfully without the church, in *The Three Truths* (1595).

In Italy and Spain, which were not much affected by the Reformation, one could find various works against the Averroists, who argued that Islam was compatible with Aristotle and, by implication, was compatible with the Christian religion. Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) wrote a remarkable, irenic apologetics summa, *On the Truth of the Christian Faith* (1543). Somewhat similar to the first book of Savonarola's *Triumph of the Cross* (1497), presented in volume 1, there are broad discussions of God and the human soul, of the main Christian mysteries—the Trinity, the Incarnation, and others—and then two dialogues. The first is between a Christian and a Jew, discussing the Old Testament prophecies, and the second is between a Christian and a Muslim, discussing the Qur'an. Finally, the treatise argues for the superiority of the Christian religion over all others.

Apologetics in the medieval period was quite varied, as we have seen. The Roman Catholic Church reached the apex of its theological output with a number of other remarkable scholars, including Anselm, Abelard, and, supremely, Thomas Aquinas. It is fair to say that most often, theology and apologetics overlapped so much that they were almost equivalent. Disputations were frequent but mostly between various understandings of Christian problems: the place of reason, the authority of the Fathers, mystical theology, doctrinal orthodoxy, and so forth. The only objections to the faith from the outside that were carefully studied were typically from Jews or Muslims (“Saracens”).

At the dawn of the modern era, all this was changing. To be sure, in the sixteenth century the major disputes were internecine, since almost all scholars believed in the Christian faith. Even the skeptical Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) felt that we could live with paradoxes because, in the end, we may rest in the authority of the church. Yet there were winds of change, so that by the seventeenth century we find, alongside the development of post-Reformation orthodoxy, the rise of deism, indifference, Socinianism, and, of course, the force of the Enlightenment.

10. Three vols., 1586, 1588, 1593. We know of no English translation of this work.

CHAPTER I

Martin Luther

(1483–1546)

Because so much has been written about Martin Luther, and so much is known, we will confine our biographical comments to providing an introductory context for the work excerpted below.

Luther was born in Eiselben, Germany, in 1483 and died in the same city in 1546. Well educated and destined, according to his father's wishes, for a career in law, Luther changed his course in 1505 when a terrifying experience caused him to commit himself to the ministry.¹ In that year, he entered the monastery of the Augustinian Hermits in Erfurt and was ordained a priest in 1507. By 1511 Luther became a doctor of theology. Having previously lectured at the (then new) University of Wittenberg, Luther became a professor of that institution, and he maintained that post until his death.

It was the Peasants' War that changed the way many would understand the Reformation. Because of the war, Erasmus turned against Luther. Luther responded with perhaps his best theological treatise, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525). During the course of his life Luther completed a translation of the entirety of Scripture and wrote biblical commentaries, theological works, and the Great Catechism for pastors, as well as a Short Catechism for broader use.

In 1546, nearly thirty years after nailing his Ninety-Five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg, Luther was buried at that same church. His influence cannot be overestimated, both in Catholic and Protestant circles.

Luther is best known as the man who sparked the Protestant Reformation. Dissatisfied with the corruption of the church that he witnessed as a pastor, he determined to challenge many of its practices, initially, by nailing Ninety-Five

1. Accounts differ as to what drove Luther to the monastery. Possibilities offered by historians are (1) a bolt of lightning that almost killed him, (2) a lightning strike that killed his friend, and (3) an abusive childhood.

Theses to the castle church door of the University of Wittenberg. The castle church door was the standard location for announcements and for disputations such as this to be posted. Luther also sent the theses to the archbishop, who, together with his councillors, reviewed them. The councillors concluded that elements of Luther's theses were in direct opposition to church teaching and thus were heretical. Their report, together with Luther's theses, was then sent to the pope. Following this conciliar judgment, a series of debates, disputations, and councils ensued in which Luther's challenges to the church were taken up. Facing some of the most formidable theologians of his time, Luther was ordered to recant his views and to submit himself to the authority of the church.

While debates are ongoing as to the exact time of Luther's "conversion," there is little doubt that his definitive break with Rome took place over the course of the year 1520, in which the work excerpted below was written. During that year, Luther wrote three works that move definitively toward a Reformation of the church. The first is an appeal to the emperor (also meant to stir the laity) to do away with the authority of the pope, masses for the dead, and other Romanist teachings. The second work, addressed primarily for the clergy, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, is Luther's exposition and denial of the efficacy of the Romanist sacramental system, particularly focused on the Romanist view of the sacrament of communion. Luther denies transubstantiation and argues for communion in "both kinds," that is, partaking of *both* bread and wine (in the Romanist system, only the priest partakes of the wine).

Luther's third work, *Concerning Christian Liberty* (or *On Christian Freedom*), written in the fall of 1520, is the one we have included here. It extols one of Luther's central theological themes—justification by grace through faith, and not by works. Though, as we have said, these three works mark Luther as a Reformer, it will become clear below that Luther does not envision himself, at this point, as anything but a priest of the church. He is in no way hostile toward Pope Leo X, to whom this work is addressed, and he seeks to argue as one whose allegiance is still within the Romanist church. Note, for example:

Wherefore, most excellent Leo, I beseech you to accept my vindication, made in this letter, and to persuade yourself that I have never thought any evil concerning your person; further, that I am one who desires that eternal blessing may fall to your lot, and that I have no dispute with any man concerning morals, but only concerning the word of truth. In all other things I will yield to any one, but I neither can nor will forsake and deny the word. He who thinks otherwise of me,

or has taken in my words in another sense, does not think rightly, and has not taken in the truth.²

The context for *Concerning Christian Liberty* includes the fact that, in June of the same year, Luther was already censured by the pope as heretical. His books were ordered burned and he was given sixty days to recant his views. Though he appeals to Pope Leo in this work, it is clear that the relationship between him and the pope is all but broken. Luther has not recanted his views, and instead of burning his works, he later (in December) burns the papal bull that declares him a heretic. Clearly, Luther's goal in all of his writings to this point was to reform the church, not to conform to what he saw to be unbiblical teachings propagated within it.

As Luther explains to the pope, he is not interested in attacking the pope's person. He is, however, concerned with the deep and abiding corruption that seems to persist in the church over which this pope is the head. Luther, in other words, distinguishes between the *person* of the pope and the *church*, which is itself, according to Luther, corrupt.

Your see, however, which is called the Court of Rome, and which neither you nor any man can deny to be more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom, and quite, as I believe, of a lost, desperate, and hopeless impiety, this I have verily abominated, and have felt indignant that the people of Christ should be cheated under your name and the pretext of the Church of Rome; and so I have resisted, and will resist, as long as the spirit of faith shall live in me. Not that I am striving after impossibilities, or hoping that by my labours alone, against the furious opposition of so many flatterers, any good can be done in that most disordered Babylon; but that I feel myself a debtor to my brethren, and am bound to take thought for them, that fewer of them may be ruined, or that their ruin may be less complete, by the plagues of Rome. For many years now, nothing else has overflowed from Rome into the world—as you are not ignorant—than the laying waste of goods, of bodies, and of souls, and the worst examples of all the worst things. These things are clearer than the light to all men; and the Church of Rome, formerly the most holy of all Churches, has become the most lawless den of thieves, the most shameless of all brothels, the very kingdom of sin, death, and hell; so that not even antichrist, if he were to come, could devise any addition to its wickedness.³

Clearly Luther sees himself as a reformer at this point, and he is convinced that the church needs significant reform.

2. Martin Luther, "Concerning Christian Liberty," trans. R. S. Grignon, in *The Five-Foot Shelf of Books*, The Harvard Classics 36 (New York: P. F. Collier, 1910), 354–55.

3. Ibid., 355.

Is it not true that there is nothing under the vast heavens more corrupt, more pestilential, more hateful, than the Court of Rome? She incomparably surpasses the impiety of the Turks, so that in very truth she, who was formerly the gate of heaven, is now a sort of open mouth of hell, and such a mouth as, under the urgent wrath of God, cannot be blocked up; one course alone being left to us wretched men: to call back and save some few, if we can, from that Roman gulf.⁴

In August of 1518, Luther met with Cardinal Cajetan, the papal legate in Wittenberg. Cajetan had established himself as an able Romanist theologian. He had been given the task of meeting with Luther in Augsburg in order to convince him to recant those teaching which opposed the Romanist church. Luther describes his discussion with Cajetan to the pope this way:

I believe it is known to you in what way Cardinal Cajetan, your imprudent and unfortunate, nay unfaithful, legate, acted towards me. When, on account of my reverence for your name, I had placed myself and all that was mine in his hands, he did not so act as to establish peace, which he could easily have established by one little word, since I at that time promised to be silent and to make an end of my case, if he would command my adversaries to do the same. But that man of pride, not content with this agreement, began to justify my adversaries, to give them free licence, and to order me to recant, a thing which was certainly not in his commission.⁵

Included in Luther's introductory letter to Pope Leo is his assessment of some of the discussions and debates that preceded the writing of this work. John Eck, an able and astute Romanist theologian, had studied and critiqued Luther's Ninety-Five Theses in some detail. By the summer of 1519, Eck and Luther were engaged in an official debate, the Leipzig Disputation, wherein they discussed such matters as penance, purgatory, and papal authority. So, according to Luther:

While I was making some advance in these studies, Satan opened his eyes and goaded on his servant John Eccius, that notorious adversary of Christ, by the unchecked lust for fame, to drag me unexpectedly into the arena, trying to catch me in one little word concerning the primacy of the Church of Rome, which had fallen from me in passing. That boastful Thraso,⁶ foaming and gnashing his teeth...⁷

Luther's *Concerning Christian Liberty* is an apologetic work. There are two important aspects about this apologetic that should not escape our attention. First, it is a *theological* apologetic. Luther is not engaging discussions such as

4. Ibid., 356.

5. Ibid., 357.

6. A foolish soldier.

7. Ibid., 357.

the existence of God or the possibility of miracles. Rather, he is attempting to purify, to *reform*, that which calls itself the church of Jesus Christ. Second, we should note that there is, always and everywhere, a need for apologetics *within the church*. While much of apologetics deals with rank unbelief, that unbelief, even if in nascent form and shrouded in Christian terminology, can take its place within the church itself (since elements of unbelief remain within every Christian) to such an extent that the urgent need of the hour is to expunge such teaching from Christ's church.

Luther was a pastor-theologian, concerned to stand on the authority of Scripture alone in order that his sheep might grasp the centrality of grace in the gospel of Christ. This work is a defense of that grace-soaked gospel against all attempts to mix with it the vinegar of the Christian's own sin-tainted efforts.

Concerning Christian Liberty

Part 2 Beginning of the Treatise*

Christian faith has appeared to many an easy thing; nay, not a few even reckon it among the social virtues, as it were; and this they do because they have not made proof of it experimentally, and have never tasted of what efficacy it is. For it is not possible for any man to write well about it, or to understand well what is rightly written, who has not at some time tasted of its spirit, under the pressure of tribulation; while he who has tasted of it, even to a very small extent, can never write, speak, think, or hear about it sufficiently. For it is a living fountain, springing up into eternal life, as Christ calls it in John iv.

Now, though I cannot boast of my abundance, and though I know how poorly I am furnished, yet I hope that, after having been vexed by various temptations, I have attained some little drop of faith, and that I can speak of this matter, if not with more elegance, certainly with more solidity, than those literal and too subtle disputants who have hitherto discoursed upon it without understanding their own words. That I may open then an easier way for the ignorant—for these alone I am trying to serve—I first lay down these two propositions, concerning spiritual liberty and servitude:—

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one.

Although these statements appear contradictory, yet, when they are found to agree together, they will make excellently for my purpose. They are both the statements of Paul himself, who says, “Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all” (1 Cor. ix. 19), and “Owe no man anything, but to love one another” (Rom. xiii. 8). Now love is by its own nature dutiful and obedient to the beloved object. Thus even Christ, though Lord of all things, was yet made of a woman; made under the law; at once free and a servant; at once in the form of God and in the form of a servant.

Let us examine the subject on a deeper and less simple principle. Man is composed of a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily. As regards the spiritual nature, which they name the soul, he is called the spiritual, inward, new man; as regards the bodily nature, which they name the flesh, he is called the fleshly, outward, old man. The Apostle speaks of this: “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. iv. 16). The result of this diversity is

*Excerpt from Martin Luther, “Concerning Christian Liberty,” trans. R. S. Grignon, in *The Five-Foot Shelf of Books*, The Harvard Classics 36 (New York: P. F. Collier, 1910), 353–97.

that in the Scriptures opposing statements are made concerning the same man, the fact being that in the same man these two men are opposed to one another; the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Gal. v. 17).

We first approach the subject of the inward man, that we may see by what means a man becomes justified, free, and a true Christian; that is, a spiritual, new, and inward man. It is certain that absolutely none among outward things, under whatever name they may be reckoned, has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or liberty, nor, on the other hand, unrighteousness or slavery. This can be shown by an easy argument.

What can it profit the soul that the body should be in good condition, free, and full of life; that it should eat, drink, and act according to its pleasure; when even the most impious slaves of every kind of vice are prosperous in these matters? Again, what harm can ill-health, bondage, hunger, thirst, or any other outward evil, do to the soul, when even the most pious of men and the freest in the purity of their conscience, are harassed by these things? Neither of these states of things has to do with the liberty or the slavery of the soul.

And so it will profit nothing that the body should be adorned with sacred vestments, or dwell in holy places, or be occupied in sacred offices, or pray, fast, and abstain from certain meats, or do whatever works can be done through the body and in the body. Something widely different will be necessary for the justification and liberty of the soul, since the things I have spoken of can be done by any impious person, and only hypocrites are produced by devotion to these things. On the other hand, it will not at all injure the soul that the body should be clothed in profane raiment, should dwell in profane places, should eat and drink in the ordinary fashion, should not pray aloud, and should leave undone all the things above mentioned, which may be done by hypocrites.

And, to cast everything aside, even speculation, meditations, and whatever things can be performed by the exertions of the soul itself, are of no profit. One thing, and one alone, is necessary for life, justification, and Christian liberty; and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ, as He says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me shall not die eternally" (John xi. 25), and also, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John viii. 36), and, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4).

Let us therefore hold it for certain and firmly established that the soul can do without everything except the word of God, without which none at all of its wants are provided for. But, having the word, it is rich and wants for nothing, since that is the word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of justification, of salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of virtue, of grace, of glory, and of every good thing. It is on this account that the prophet in a whole Psalm (Psalm cxix), and

in many other places, sighs for and calls upon the word of God with so many groanings and words.

Again, there is no more cruel stroke of the wrath of God than when He sends a famine of hearing His words (Amos viii. 11), just as there is no greater favour from Him than the sending forth of His word, as it is said, "He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions" (Psalm cvii. 20). Christ was sent for no other office than that of the word; and the order of Apostles, that of bishops, and that of the whole body of the clergy, have been called and instituted for no object but the ministry of the word.

But you will ask, What is this word, and by what means is it to be used, since there are so many words of God? I answer, The Apostle Paul (Rom. i.) explains what it is, namely the Gospel of God, concerning His Son, incarnate, suffering, risen, and glorified, through the Spirit, the Sanctifier. To preach Christ is to feed the soul, to justify it, to set it free, and to save it, if it believes the preaching. For faith alone and the efficacious use of the word of God, bring salvation. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. x. 9); and again, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4), and "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. i. 17). For the word of God cannot be received and honoured by any works, but by faith alone. Hence it is clear that as the soul needs the word alone for life and justification, so it is justified by faith alone, and not by any works. For if it could be justified by any other means, it would have no need of the word, nor consequently of faith.

But this faith cannot consist at all with works; that is, if you imagine that you can be justified by those works, whatever they are, along with it. For this would be to halt between two opinions, to worship Baal, and to kiss the hand to him, which is a very great iniquity, as Job says. Therefore, when you begin to believe, you learn at the same time that all that is in you is utterly guilty, sinful, and damnable, according to that saying, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23), and also: "There is none righteous, no, not one; they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. iii. 10–12). When you have learnt this, you will know that Christ is necessary for you, since He has suffered and risen again for you, that, believing on Him, you might by this faith become another man, all your sins being remitted, and you being justified by the merits of another, namely of Christ alone.

Since then this faith can reign only in the inward man, as it is said, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. x. 10); and since it alone justifies, it is evident that by no outward work or labour can the inward man be at all justified, made free, and saved; and that no works whatever have any relation to him. And so, on the other hand, it is solely by impiety and incredulity of heart

that he becomes guilty and a slave of sin, deserving condemnation, not by any outward sin or work. Therefore the first care of every Christian ought to be to lay aside all reliance on works, and strengthen his faith alone more and more, and by it grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who has suffered and risen again for him, as Peter teaches (1 Peter v.) when he makes no other work to be a Christian one. Thus Christ, when the Jews asked Him what they should do that they might work the works of God, rejected the multitude of works, with which He saw that they were puffed up, and commanded them one thing only, saying, "This is the work of God: that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent"; "for Him hath God the Father sealed" (John vi. 27, 29).

Hence a right faith in Christ is an incomparable treasure, carrying with it universal salvation and preserving from all evil, as it is said, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16). Isaiah, looking to this treasure, predicted, "The consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord God of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined (*verbum abbreviatum et consummans*), in the midst of the land" (Isa. x. 22, 23). As if he said, "Faith, which is the brief and complete fulfilling of the law, will fill those who believe with such righteousness that they will need nothing else for justification." Thus, too, Paul says, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. x. 10).

But you ask how it can be the fact that faith alone justifies, and affords without works so great a treasure of good things, when so many works, ceremonies, and laws are prescribed to us in the Scriptures? I answer, Before all things bear in mind what I have said: that faith alone without works justifies, sets free, and saves, as I shall show more clearly below.

Meanwhile it is to be noted that the whole Scripture of God is divided into two parts: precepts and promises. The precepts certainly teach us what is good, but what they teach is not forthwith done. For they show us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power to do it. They were ordained, however, for the purpose of showing man to himself, that through them he may learn his own impotence for good and may despair of his own strength. For this reason they are called the Old Testament, and are so.

For example, "Thou shalt not covet," is a precept by which we are all convicted of sin, since no man can help coveting, whatever efforts to the contrary he may make. In order therefore that he may fulfil the precept, and not covet, he is constrained to despair of himself and to seek elsewhere and through another the help which he cannot find in himself; as it is said, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help" (Hosea xiii. 9). Now what is done by this one precept is done by all; for all are equally impossible of fulfilment by us.

Now when a man has through the precepts been taught his own impotence, and become anxious by what means he may satisfy the law—for the law must be

satisfied, so that no jot or tittle of it may pass away, otherwise he must be hopelessly condemned—then, being truly humbled and brought to nothing in his own eyes, he finds in himself no resource for justification and salvation.

Then comes in that other part of Scripture, the promises of God, which declare the glory of God, and say, “If you wish to fulfil the law, and, as the law requires, not to covet, lo! believe in Christ, in whom are promised to you grace, justification, peace, and liberty.” All these things you shall have, if you believe, and shall be without them if you do not believe. For what is impossible for you by all the works of the law, which are many and yet useless, you shall fulfil in an easy and summary way through faith, because God the Father has made everything to depend on faith, so that whosoever has it has all things, and he who has it not has nothing. “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all” (Rom. xi. 32). Thus the promises of God give that which the precepts exact, and fulfil what the law commands; so that all is of God alone, both the precepts and their fulfilment. He alone commands; He alone also fulfils. Hence the promises of God belong to the New Testament; nay, are the New Testament.

Now, since these promises of God are words of holiness, truth, righteousness, liberty, and peace, and are full of universal goodness, the soul, which cleaves to them with a firm faith, is so united to them, nay, thoroughly absorbed by them, that it not only partakes in, but is penetrated and saturated by, all their virtues. For if the touch of Christ was healing, how much more does that most tender spiritual touch, nay, absorption of the word, communicate to the soul all that belongs to the word! In this way therefore the soul, through faith alone, without works, is from the word of God justified, sanctified, endued with truth, peace, and liberty, and filled full with every good thing, and is truly made the child of God, as it is said, “To them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John i. 12).

From all this it is easy to understand why faith has such great power, and why no good works, nor even all good works put together, can compare with it, since no work can cleave to the word of God or be in the soul. Faith alone and the word reign in it; and such as is the word, such is the soul made by it, just as iron exposed to fire glows like fire, on account of its union with the fire. It is clear then that to a Christian man his faith suffices for everything, and that he has no need of works for justification. But if he has no need of works, neither has he need of the law; and if he has no need of the law, he is certainly free from the law, and the saying is true, “The law is not made for a righteous man” (1 Tim. i. 9). This is that Christian liberty, our faith, the effect of which is, not that we should be careless or lead a bad life, but that no one should need the law or works for justification and salvation.

Let us consider this as the first virtue of faith; and let us look also to the second. This also is an office of faith: that it honours with the utmost veneration and

the highest reputation Him in whom it believes, inasmuch as it holds Him to be truthful and worthy of belief. For there is no honour like that reputation of truth and righteousness with which we honour Him in whom we believe. What higher credit can we attribute to any one than truth and righteousness, and absolute goodness? On the other hand, it is the greatest insult to brand any one with the reputation of falsehood and unrighteousness, or to suspect him of these, as we do when we disbelieve him.

Thus the soul, in firmly believing the promises of God, holds Him to be true and righteous; and it can attribute to God no higher glory than the credit of being so. The highest worship of God is to ascribe to Him truth, righteousness, and whatever qualities we must ascribe to one in whom we believe. In doing this the soul shows itself prepared to do His whole will; in doing this it hallows His name, and gives itself up to be dealt with as it may please God. For it cleaves to His promises, and never doubts that He is true, just, and wise, and will do, dispose, and provide for all things in the best way. Is not such a soul, in this its faith, most obedient to God in all things? What commandment does there remain which has not been amply fulfilled by such an obedience? What fulfilment can be more full than universal obedience? Now this is not accomplished by works, but by faith alone.

On the other hand, what greater rebellion, impiety, or insult to God can there be, than not to believe His promises? What else is this, than either to make God a liar, or to doubt His truth—that is, to attribute truth to ourselves, but to God falsehood and levity? In doing this, is not a man denying God and setting himself up as an idol in his own heart? What then can works, done in such a state of impiety, profit us, were they even angelic or apostolic works? Rightly hath God shut up all, not in wrath nor in lust, but in unbelief, in order that those who pretend that they are fulfilling the law by works of purity and benevolence (which are social and human virtues) may not presume that they will therefore be saved, but, being included in the sin of unbelief, may either seek mercy, or be justly condemned.

But when God sees that truth is ascribed to Him, and that in the faith of our hearts He is honoured with all the honour of which He is worthy, then in return He honours us on account of that faith, attributing to us truth and righteousness. For faith does truth and righteousness in rendering to God what is His; and therefore in return God gives glory to our righteousness. It is true and righteous that God is true and righteous; and to confess this and ascribe these attributes to Him, this it is to be true and righteous. Thus He says, “Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. ii. 30). And so Paul says that Abraham’s faith was imputed to him for righteousness, because by it he gave glory to God; and that to us also, for the same reason, it shall be imputed for righteousness, if we believe (Rom. iv.).

The third incomparable grace of faith is this: that it unites the soul to Christ, as the wife to the husband, by which mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul are made one flesh. Now if they are one flesh, and if a true marriage—nay, by far the most perfect of all marriages—is accomplished between them (for human marriages are but feeble types of this one great marriage), then it follows that all they have becomes theirs in common, as well good things as evil things; so that whatsoever Christ possesses, that the believing soul may take to itself and boast of as its own, and whatever belongs to the soul, that Christ claims as His.

If we compare these possessions, we shall see how inestimable is the gain. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation; the soul is full of sin, death, and condemnation. Let faith step in, and then sin, death, and hell will belong to Christ, and grace, life, and salvation to the soul. For, if He is a Husband, He must needs take to Himself that which is His wife's, and at the same time, impart to His wife that which is His. For, in giving her His own body and Himself, how can He but give her all that is His? And, in taking to Himself the body of His wife, how can He but take to Himself all that is hers?

In this is displayed the delightful sight, not only of communion, but of a prosperous warfare, of victory, salvation, and redemption. For, since Christ is God and man, and is such a Person as neither has sinned, nor dies, nor is condemned, nay, cannot sin, die, or be condemned, and since His righteousness, life, and salvation are invincible, eternal, and almighty,—when I say, such a Person, by the wedding-ring of faith, takes a share in the sins, death, and hell of His wife, nay, makes them His own, and deals with them no otherwise than as if they were His, and as if He Himself had sinned; and when He suffers, dies, and descends to hell, that He may overcome all things, and since sin, death, and hell cannot swallow Him up, they must needs be swallowed up by Him in stupendous conflict. For His righteousness rises above the sins of all men; His life is more powerful than all death; His salvation is more unconquerable than all hell.

Thus the believing soul, by the pledge of its faith in Christ, becomes free from all sin, fearless of death, safe from hell, and endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of its Husband Christ. Thus He presents to Himself a glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word; that is, by faith in the word of life, righteousness, and salvation. Thus He betrothes her unto Himself “in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies” (Hosea ii. 19, 20).

Who then can value highly enough these royal nuptials? Who can comprehend the riches of the glory of this grace? Christ, that rich and pious Husband, takes as a wife a needy and impious harlot, redeeming her from all her evils and supplying her with all His good things. It is impossible now that her sins should destroy her, since they have been laid upon Christ and swallowed up in Him, and since she has in her Husband Christ a righteousness which she may claim as her own,

and which she can set up with confidence against all her sins, against death and hell, saying, "If I have sinned, my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned; all mine is His, and all His is mine," as it is written, "My beloved is mine, and I am His" (Cant. ii. 16). This is what Paul says: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," victory over sin and death, as he says, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. xv. 56, 57).

From all this you will again understand why so much importance is attributed to faith, so that it alone can fulfill the law and justify without any works. For you see that the First Commandment, which says, "Thou shalt worship one God only," is fulfilled by faith alone. If you were nothing but good works from the soles of your feet to the crown of your head, you would not be worshipping God, nor fulfilling the First Commandment, since it is impossible to worship God without ascribing to Him the glory of truth and of universal goodness, as it ought in truth to be ascribed. Now this is not done by works, but only by faith of heart. It is not by working, but by believing, that we glorify God, and confess Him to be true. On this ground faith alone is the righteousness of a Christian man, and the fulfilling of all the commandments. For to him who fulfils the first the task of fulfilling all the rest is easy.

Works, since they are irrational things, cannot glorify God, although they may be done to the glory of God, if faith be present. But at present we are inquiring, not into the quality of the works done, but into him who does them, who glorifies God, and brings forth good works. This is faith of heart, the head and the substance of all our righteousness. Hence that is a blind and perilous doctrine which teaches that the commandments are fulfilled by works. The commandments must have been fulfilled previous to any good works, and good works follow their fulfillment, as we shall see.

But, that we may have a wider view of that grace which our inner man has in Christ, we must know that in the Old Testament God sanctified to Himself every first-born male. The birthright was of great value, giving a superiority over the rest by the double honour of priesthood and kingship. For the first-born brother was priest and lord of all the rest.

Under this figure was foreshown Christ, the true and only First-born of God the Father and of the Virgin Mary, and a true King and Priest, not in a fleshly and earthly sense. For His kingdom is not of this world; it is in heavenly and spiritual things that He reigns and acts as Priest; and these are righteousness, truth, wisdom, peace, salvation, etc. Not but that all things, even those of earth and hell, are subject to Him—for otherwise how could He defend and save us from them?—but it is not in these, nor by these, that His kingdom stands.

So, too, His priesthood does not consist in the outward display of vestments and gestures, as did the human priesthood of Aaron and our ecclesiastical priesthood at this day, but in spiritual things, wherein, in His invisible office, He intercedes

for us with God in heaven, and there offers Himself, and performs all the duties of a priest, as Paul describes Him to the Hebrews under the figure of Melchizedek. Nor does He only pray and intercede for us; He also teaches us inwardly in the spirit with the living teachings of His Spirit. Now these are the two special offices of a priest, as is figured to us in the case of fleshly priests by visible prayers and sermons.

As Christ by His birthright has obtained these two dignities, so He imparts and communicates them to every believer in Him, under that law of matrimony of which we have spoken above, by which all that is the husband's is also the wife's. Hence all we who believe on Christ are kings and priests in Christ, as it is said, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 9).

These two things stand thus. First, as regards kingship, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, in spiritual power, he is completely lord of all things, so that nothing whatever can do him any hurt; yea, all things are subject to him, and are compelled to be subservient to his salvation. Thus Paul says, "All things work together for good to them who are the called" (Rom. viii. 28), and also, "Whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Christ's" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23).

Not that in the sense of corporeal power any one among Christians has been appointed to possess and rule all things, according to the mad and senseless idea of certain ecclesiastics. That is the office of kings, princes, and men upon earth. In the experience of life we see that we are subjected to all things, and suffer many things, even death. Yea, the more of a Christian any man is, to so many the more evils, sufferings, and deaths is he subject, as we see in the first place in Christ the First-born, and in all His holy brethren.

This is a spiritual power, which rules in the midst of enemies, and is powerful in the midst of distresses. And this is nothing else than that strength is made perfect in my weakness, and that I can turn all things to the profit of my salvation; so that even the cross and death are compelled to serve me and to work together for my salvation. This is a lofty and eminent dignity, a true and almighty dominion, a spiritual empire, in which there is nothing so good, nothing so bad, as not to work together for my good, if only I believe. And yet there is nothing of which I have need—for faith alone suffices for my salvation—unless that in it faith may exercise the power and empire of its liberty. This is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.

Nor are we only kings and the freest of all men, but also priests for ever, a dignity far higher than kingship, because by that priesthood we are worthy to appear before God, to pray for others, and to teach one another mutually the things which are of God. For these are the duties of priests, and they cannot possibly be permitted

to any unbeliever. Christ has obtained for us this favour, if we believe in Him: that just as we are His brethren and co-heirs and fellow-kings with Him, so we should be also fellow-priests with Him, and venture with confidence, through the spirit of faith, to come into the presence of God, and cry, “Abba, Father!” and to pray for one another, and to do all things which we see done and figured in the visible and corporeal office of priesthood. But to an unbelieving person nothing renders service or work for good. He himself is in servitude to all things, and all things turn out for evil to him, because he uses all things in an impious way for his own advantage, and not for the glory of God. And thus he is not a priest, but a profane person, whose prayers are turned into sin, nor does he ever appear in the presence of God, because God does not hear sinners.

Who then can comprehend the loftiness of that Christian dignity which, by its royal power, rules over all things, even over death, life, and sin, and, by its priestly glory, is all-powerful with God, since God does what He Himself seeks and wishes, as it is written, “He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He also will hear their cry, and will save them”? (Psalm cxlv. 19). This glory certainly cannot be attained by any works, but by faith only.

From these considerations any one may clearly see how a Christian man is free from all things; so that he needs no works in order to be justified and saved, but receives these gifts in abundance from faith alone. Nay, were he so foolish as to pretend to be justified, set free, saved, and made a Christian, by means of any good work, he would immediately lose faith, with all its benefits. Such folly is prettily represented in the fable where a dog, running along in the water and carrying in his mouth a real piece of meat, is deceived by the reflection of the meat in the water, and, in trying with open mouth to seize it, loses the meat and its image at the same time.

Here you will ask, “If all who are in the Church are priests, by what character are those whom we now call priests to be distinguished from the laity?” I reply, By the use of these words, “priest,” “clergy,” “spiritual person,” “ecclesiastic,” an injustice has been done, since they have been transferred from the remaining body of Christians to those few who are now, by hurtful custom, called ecclesiastics. For Holy Scripture makes no distinction between them, except that those who are now boastfully called popes, bishops, and lords, it calls ministers, servants, and stewards, who are to serve the rest in the ministry of the word, for teaching the faith of Christ and the liberty of believers. For though it is true that we are all equally priests, yet we cannot, nor, if we could, ought we all to, minister and teach publicly. Thus Paul says, “Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. iv. 1).

This bad system has now issued in such a pompous display of power and such a terrible tyranny that no earthly government can be compared to it, as if the laity were something else than Christians. Through this perversion of things it has

happened that the knowledge of Christian grace, of faith, of liberty, and altogether of Christ, has utterly perished, and has been succeeded by an intolerable bondage to human works and laws; and, according to the Lamentations of Jeremiah, we have become the slaves of the vilest men on earth, who abuse our misery to all the disgraceful and ignominious purposes of their own will.

Returning to the subject which we had begun, I think it is made clear by these considerations that it is not sufficient, nor a Christian course, to preach the works, life, and words of Christ in a historic manner, as facts which it suffices to know as an example how to frame our life, as do those who are now held the best preachers, and much less so to keep silence altogether on these things and to teach in their stead the laws of men and the decrees of the Fathers. There are now not a few persons who preach and read about Christ with the object of moving the human affections to sympathise with Christ, to indignation against the Jews, and other childish and womanish absurdities of that kind.

Now preaching ought to have the object of promoting faith in Him, so that He may not only be Christ, but a Christ for you and for me, and that what is said of Him, and what He is called, may work in us. And this faith is produced and is maintained by preaching why Christ came, what He has brought us and given to us, and to what profit and advantage He is to be received. This is done when the Christian liberty which we have from Christ Himself is rightly taught, and we are shown in what manner all we Christians are kings and priests, and how we are lords of all things, and may be confident that whatever we do in the presence of God is pleasing and acceptable to Him.

Whose heart would not rejoice in its inmost core at hearing these things? Whose heart, on receiving so great a consolation, would not become sweet with the love of Christ, a love to which it can never attain by any laws or works? Who can injure such a heart, or make it afraid? If the consciousness of sin or the horror of death rush in upon it, it is prepared to hope in the Lord, and is fearless of such evils, and undisturbed, until it shall look down upon its enemies. For it believes that the righteousness of Christ is its own, and that its sin is no longer its own, but that of Christ; but, on account of its faith in Christ, all its sin must needs be swallowed up from before the face of the righteousness of Christ, as I have said above. It learns, too, with the Apostle, to scoff at death and sin, and to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 55–57). For death is swallowed up in victory, not only the victory of Christ, but ours also, since by faith it becomes ours, and in it we too conquer.

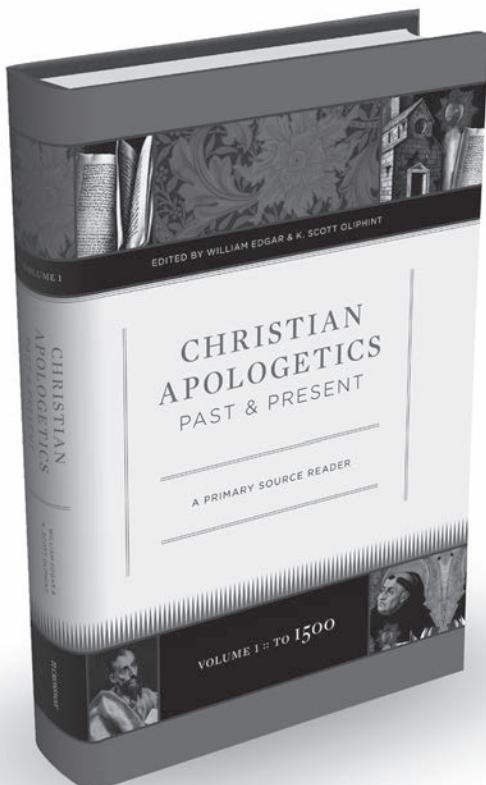
Let it suffice to say this concerning the inner man and its liberty, and concerning that righteousness of faith which needs neither laws nor good works; nay, they are even hurtful to it, if any one pretends to be justified by them.

DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

1. What is Luther's primary concern in this text?
2. Since apologetics deals with elements of unbelief, what area(s) or aspect(s) of unbelief is Luther combatting?
3. What does Luther mean when he says, "No work can cleave to the word of God or be in the soul"? Is this correct?
4. Why does Luther call works "irrational things"?
5. How would you describe the relationship of faith and works in this article? Is Luther right in his assessment of them?

ALSO AVAILABLE

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS PAST & PRESENT



A PRIMARY SOURCE READER
(VOLUME 1)

“The texts here assembled are ‘classics’—not in the sense that they answer all legitimate questions about Christianity, but that, when they were written, they made their readers think hard about the faith, and that they continue to do so today. This is a most worthy collection.”

Mark A. Noll, *Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History, University of Notre Dame*

“This series on the classical traditions of Christian apologetics is, to my knowledge, unmatched in basic compendia. It will equip and encourage thoughtful Christians to develop equally compelling defenses of the faith.”

Max L. Stackhouse, *De Vries Professor of Theology and Public Life Emeritus, Princeton Theological Seminary*

“This collection is superbly done and will bring much needed wisdom to our own times.”

David F. Wells, *Distinguished Senior Research Professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*

“Bill Edgar, one of evangelicalism’s most valued scholars and apologists, has given us in this series with Scott Oliphint a classic destined to be used for generations. I highly recommend it to all who are called to defend the faith.”

Chuck Colson, *Founder, Prison Fellowship*

“For years I have wanted a collection of primary sources in apologetics to use in my classes. Now we have an excellent one.”

John Frame, *J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando*

“Edgar and Oliphint have skillfully selected the best primary sources. Their series fills a gap in scholarly resources and highlights the strength, wisdom, and solidity of the prominent defenders of our faith.”

J. I. Packer, *Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology, Regent College*

WILLIAM EDGAR (ThD, University of Geneva) is professor of apologetics and coordinator of the apologetics department at Westminster Theological Seminary. His books include *Reasons of the Heart*, *The Face of Truth*, and *Truth in All Its Glory*.

K. SCOTT OLIPHINT (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary) is professor of apologetics and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. His books include *Things That Cannot Be Shaken* and *Revelation and Reason*.