

Of The Matters To Be Considered In The Councils

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Of The Matters To Be Considered In The Councils

Let us now consider the matters which should be treated in the councils, and with which popes, cardinals, bishops, and all learned men should occupy themselves day and night, if they love Christ and His Church. But if they do not do so, the people at large and the temporal powers must do so, without considering the thunders of their excommunications. For an unjust excommunication is better than ten just absolutions, and an unjust absolution is worse than ten just excommunications. Therefore let us rouse ourselves, fellow-Germans, and fear God more than man, that we be not answerable for all the poor souls that are so miserably lost through the wicked, devilish government of the Romanists, and that the dominion of the devil should not grow day by day, if indeed this hellish government can grow any worse, which, for my part, I can neither conceive nor believe.

1. It is a distressing and terrible thing to see that the head of Christendom, who boasts of being the vicar of Christ and the successor of St. Peter, lives in a worldly pomp that no king or emperor can equal, so that in him that calls himself most holy and most spiritual there is more worldliness than in the world itself. He wears a triple crown, whereas the mightiest kings only wear one crown. If this resembles the poverty of Christ and St. Peter, it is a new sort of resemblance. They prate of its being heretical to object to this; nay, they will not even hear how unchristian and ungodly it is. But I think that if he should have to pray to God with tears, he would have to lay down his crowns; for God will not endure any arrogance. His office should be nothing else than to weep and pray constantly for Christendom and to be an example of all humility.

However this may be, this pomp is a stumbling-block, and the Pope, for the very salvation of his soul, ought to put it off, for St. Paul says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. v. 21), and again, "Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (2 Cor. viii. 21). A simple mitre would be enough for the pope: wisdom and sanctity should raise him above the rest; the crown of pride he should leave to antichrist, as his predecessors did some hundreds of years ago. They say, He is the ruler of the world. This is false; for Christ, whose vicegerent and vicar he claims to be, said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John xviii. 36). But no vicegerent can have a wider dominion than this Lord, nor is he a vicegerent of Christ in His glory, but of Christ crucified, as St. Paul says, "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (2 Cor. ii. 2), and "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who made Himself of

no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant" (Phil. ii. 5, 7). Again, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. i.). Now they make the Pope a vicerent of Christ exalted in heaven, and some have let the devil rule them so thoroughly that they have maintained that the Pope is above the angels in heaven and has power over them, which is precisely the true work of the true antichrist.

2. What is the use in Christendom of the people called "cardinals"? I will tell you. In Italy and Germany there are many rich convents, endowments, fiefs, and benefices, and as the best way of getting these into the hands of Rome, they created cardinals, and gave them the sees, convents, and prelacies, and thus destroyed the service of God. That is why Italy is almost a desert now: the convents are destroyed, the sees consumed, the revenues of the prelacies and of all the churches drawn to Rome; towns are decayed, the country and the people ruined, because there is no more any worship of God or preaching; why? Because the cardinals must have all the wealth. No Turk could have thus desolated Italy and overthrown the worship of God.

Now that Italy is sucked dry, they come to Germany and begin very quietly; but if we look on quietly Germany will soon be brought into the same state as Italy. We have a few cardinals already. What the Romanists mean thereby the drunken Germans [4] are not to see until they have lost everything - bishoprics, convents, benefices, fiefs, even to their last farthing. Antichrist must take the riches of the earth, as it is written (Dan. xi. 8, 39, 43). They begin by taking off the cream of the bishoprics, convents and fiefs; and as they do not dare to destroy everything as they have done in Italy, they employ such holy cunning to join together ten or twenty prelacies, and take such a portion of each annually that the total amounts to a considerable sum. The priory of Wurzburg gives one thousand guilders; those of Bamberg, Mayence, Treves, and others also contribute. In this way they collect one thousand or ten thousand guilders, in order that a cardinal may live at Rome in a state like that of a wealthy monarch.

[4: The epithet "drunken" was formerly often applied by the Italians to the Germans.]

After we have gained this, we will create thirty or forty cardinals on one day, and give one St. Michael's Mount, [5] near Bamberg, and likewise the see of Wurzburg, to which belong some rich benefices, until the churches and the cities are desolated; and then we shall say, We are the vicars of Christ, the shepherds of Christ's flocks; those mad, drunken Germans must submit to it. I advise, however, that there be made fewer cardinals, or that the Pope should have to support them out of his own purse. It would be amply sufficient if there were twelve, and if each of them had an annual income of one thousand guilders.

[5: Luther alludes here to the Benedictine convent standing on the Monchberg, or St. Michael's Mount.]

What has brought us Germans to such a pass that we have to suffer this

robbery and this destruction of our property by the Pope? If the kingdom of France has resisted it, why do we Germans suffer ourselves to be fooled and deceived? It would be more endurable if they did nothing but rob us of our property; but they destroy the Church and deprive Christ's flock of their good shepherds, and overthrow the service and word of God. Even if there were no cardinals at all, the Church would not perish, for they do nothing for the good of Christendom; all they do is to traffic in and quarrel about prelacies and bishoprics, which any robber could do as well.

3. If we took away ninety-nine parts of the Pope's Court and only left one hundredth, it would still be large enough to answer questions on matters of belief. Now there is such a swarm of vermin at Rome, all called papal, that Babylon itself never saw the like. There are more than three thousand papal secretaries alone; but who shall count the other office-bearers, since there are so many offices that we can scarcely count them, and all waiting for German benefices, as wolves wait for a flock of sheep? I think Germany now pays more to the Pope than it formerly paid the emperors; nay, some think more than three hundred thousand guilders are sent from Germany to Rome every year, for nothing whatever; and in return we are scoffed at and put to shame. Do we still wonder why princes, noblemen, cities, foundations, convents, and people grow poor? We should rather wonder that we have anything left to eat.

Now that we have got well into our game, let us pause a while and show that the Germans are not such fools as not to perceive or understand this Romish trickery. I do not here complain that God's commandments and Christian justice are despised at Rome; for the state of things in Christendom, especially at Rome, is too bad for us to complain of such high matters. Nor do I even complain that no account is taken of natural or secular justice and reason. The mischief lies still deeper. I complain that they do not observe their own fabricated canon law, though this is in itself rather mere tyranny, avarice, and worldly pomp, than a law. This we shall now show.

Long ago the emperors and princes of Germany allowed the Pope to claim the annates [6] from all German benefices; that is, half of the first year's income from every benefice. The object of this concession was that the Pope should collect a fund with all this money to fight against the Turks and infidels, and to protect Christendom, so that the nobility should not have to bear the burden of the struggle alone, and that the priests should also contribute. The popes have made such use of this good simple piety of the Germans that they have taken this money for more than one hundred years, and have now made of it a regular tax and duty; and not only have they accumulated nothing, but they have founded out of it many posts and offices at Rome, which are paid by it yearly, as out of a ground-rent.

[6: The duty of paying annates to the Pope was established by John XXII. in 1319.]

Whenever there is any pretence of fighting the Turks, they send out some commission for collecting money, and often send out indulgences under the

same pretext of fighting the Turks. They think we Germans will always remain such great and inveterate fools that we will go on giving money to satisfy their unspeakable greed, though we see plainly that neither annates, nor absolution money, nor any other-not one farthing-goes against the Turks, but all goes into the bottomless sack. They lie and deceive, form and make covenants with us, of which they do not mean to keep one jot. And all this is done in the holy name of Christ and St. Peter.

This being so, the German nation, the bishops and princes, should remember that they are Christians, and should defend the people, who are committed to their government and protection in temporal and spiritual affairs, from these ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing that profess to be shepherds and rulers; and since the annates are so shamefully abused, and the covenants concerning them not carried out, they should not suffer their lands and people to be so piteously and unrighteously flayed and ruined; but by an imperial or a national law they should either retain the annates in the country, or abolish them altogether. For since they do not keep to the covenants, they have no right to the annates; therefore bishops and princes are bound to punish this thievery and robbery, or prevent it, as justice demands. And herein should they assist and strengthen the Pope, who is perchance too weak to prevent this scandal by himself, or, if he wishes to protect or support it, restrain and oppose him as a wolf and tyrant; for he has no authority to do evil or to protect evil-doers. Even if it were proposed to collect any such treasure for use against the Turks, we should be wise in future, and remember that the German nation is more fitted to take charge of it than the Pope, seeing that the German nation by itself is able to provide men enough, if the money is forthcoming. This matter of the annates is like many other Romish pretexts.

Moreover, the year has been divided among the Pope and the ruling bishops and foundations in such wise that the Pope has taken every other month-six in all-to give away the benefices that fall in his month; in this way almost all the benefices are drawn into the hands of Rome, and especially the best livings and dignities. And those that once fall into the hands of Rome never come out again, even if they never again fall vacant in the Pope's month. In this way the foundations come very short of their rights, and it is a downright robbery, the object of which is not to give up anything again. Therefore it is now high time to abolish the Pope's months and to take back again all that has thereby fallen into the hands of Rome. For all the princes and nobles should insist that the stolen property shall be returned, the thieves punished, and that those who abuse their powers shall be deprived of them. If the Pope can make a law on the day after his election by which he takes our benefices and livings to which he has no right, the Emperor Charles should so much the more have a right to issue a law for all Germany on the day after his coronation [7] that in future no livings and benefices are to fall to Rome by virtue of the Pope's month, but that those that have so fallen are to be freed and taken from the Romish robbers. This right he possesses authoritatively by virtue of his temporal sword.

[7: At the time when the above was written - June, 1520 - the Emperor Charles had been elected, but not yet crowned.]

But the see of avarice and robbery at Rome is unwilling to wait for the benefices to fall in one after another by means of the Pope's month; and in order to get them into its insatiable maw as speedily as possible, they have devised the plan of taking livings and benefices in three other ways:-

First, if the incumbent of a free living dies at Rome or on his way thither, his living remains for ever the property of the see of Rome, or I rather should say, the see of robbers, though they will not let us call them robbers, although no one has ever heard or read of such robbery.

Secondly, if a "servant" of the Pope or of one of the cardinals takes a living, or if, having a living, he becomes a "servant" of the Pope or of a cardinal, the living remains with Rome. But who can count the "servants" of the Pope and his cardinals, seeing that if he goes out riding, he is attended by three or four thousand mule-riders, more than any king or emperor? For Christ and St. Peter went on foot, in order that their vicegerents might indulge the better in all manner of pomp. Besides, their avarice has devised and invented this: that in foreign countries also there are many called "papal servants", as at Rome; so that in all parts this single crafty little word "papal servant" brings all benefices to the chair at Rome, and they are kept there for ever. Are not these mischievous, devilish devices? Let us only wait a while, Mayence, Magdeburg, and Halberstadt will fall very nicely to Rome, and we shall have to pay dearly for our cardinal. [8] Hereafter all the German bishops will be made cardinals, so that there shall remain nothing to ourselves.

[8: Luther alludes here to the Archbishop Albert of Mayence, who was, besides, Archbishop of Magdeburg and administrator of the bishopric of Halberstadt. In order to be able to defray the expense of the archiepiscopal tax due to Rome, amounting to thirty thousand guilders, he had farmed the sale of the Pope's indulgences, employing the notorious Tetzl as his agent and sharing the profits with the Pope. In 1518 Albert was appointed cardinal. See Ranke, *Deutsche Geschichte*, etc., vol. i., p. 309, etc.]

Thirdly, whenever there is any dispute about a benefice; and this is, I think, well-nigh the broadest and commonest road by which benefices are brought to Rome. For where there is no dispute numberless knaves can be found at Rome who are ready to scrape up disputes, and attack livings wherever they like. In this way many a good priest loses his living, or has to buy off the dispute for a time with a sum of money. These benefices, confiscated by right or wrong of dispute, are to be for ever the property of the see of Rome. It would be no wonder, if God were to rain sulphur and fire from heaven and cast Rome down into the pit, as He did formerly to Sodom and Gomorrah. What is the use of a pope in Christendom, if the only use made of his power is to commit these supreme villainies under his protection and assistance? Oh noble princes and sirs, how long will you suffer your lands and your people to be the prey

of these ravening wolves?

But these tricks did not suffice, and bishoprics were too slow in falling into the power of Roman avarice. Accordingly our good friend Avarice made the discovery that all bishoprics are abroad in name only, but that their land and soil is at Rome; from this it follows that no bishop may be confirmed until he has bought the "Pall" [9] for a large sum, and has with a terrible oath bound himself a servant of the Pope. That is why no bishop dare oppose the Pope. This was the object of the oath, and this is how the wealthiest bishoprics have come to debt and ruin. Mayence, I am told, pays twenty thousand guilders. These are true Roman tricks, it seems to me. It is true that they once decreed in the canon law that the Pall should be given free, the number of the Pope's servants diminished, disputes made less frequent, that foundations and bishops should enjoy their liberty; but all this brought them no money. They have therefore reversed all this: bishops and foundations have lost all their power; they are mere ciphers, without office, authority, or function; all things are regulated by the chief knaves at Rome, even the offices of sextons and bell-ringers in all churches. All disputes are transferred to Rome; each one does what he will, strong through the Pope's power.

[9: The Pallium was since the fourth century the symbol of archiepiscopal power, and had to be redeemed from the Pope by means of a large sum of money and a solemn oath of obedience.]

What has happened in this very year? The Bishop of Strasburg, wishing to regulate his see in a proper way and reform it in the matter of Divine service, published some Divine and Christian ordinances for that purpose. But our worthy Pope and the holy chair at Rome overturn altogether this holy and spiritual order on the requisition of the priests. This is what they call being the shepherd of Christ's sheep-supporting priests against their own bishops and protecting their disobedience by Divine decrees. Antichrist, I hope, will not insult God in this open way. There you have the Pope, as you have chosen to have him; and why? Why, because if the Church were to be reformed, there would be danger that it would spread further, so that it might also reach Rome. Therefore it is better to prevent priests from being at one with each other; they should rather, as they have done hitherto, sow discord among kings and princes, and flood the world with Christian blood, lest Christian unity should trouble the holy Roman see with reforms.

So far we have seen what they do with the livings that fall vacant. Now there are not enough vacancies for this delicate greed; therefore it has also taken prudent account of the benefices that are still held by their incumbents, so that they may become vacant, though they are in fact not vacant, and this they effect in many ways.

First, they lie in wait for fat livings or sees which are held by an old or sick man, or even by one afflicted by an imaginary incompetence; him the Roman see gives a coadjutor, that is an assistant without his asking or wishing it, for the benefit of the coadjutor, because he is a papal servant,

or pays for the office, or has otherwise earned it by some menial service rendered to Rome. Thus there is an end of free election on the part of the chapter, or of the right of him who had presented to the living; and all goes to Rome.

Secondly, there is a little word: commendam, that is, when the Pope gives a rich and fat convent or church into the charge of a cardinal or any other of his servants, just as I might command you to take charge of one hundred guilders for me. In this way the convent is neither given, nor lent, nor destroyed, nor is its Divine service abolished, but only entrusted to a man's charge, not, however, for him to protect and improve it, but to drive out the one he finds there, to take the property and revenue, and to install some apostate [10] runaway monk, who is paid five or six guilders a year, and sits in the church all day and sells symbols and pictures to the pilgrims; so that neither chanting nor reading in the church goes on there any more. Now if we were to call this the destruction of convents and abolition of Divine service we should be obliged to accuse the Pope of destroying Christianity and abolishing Divine service-for truly he is doing this effectually-but this would be thought harsh language at Rome; therefore it is called a commendam, or an order to take charge of the convent. In this way the Pope can make commendams of four or more convents a year, any one of which produces a revenue of more than six thousand guilders. This is the way Divine service is advanced and convents kept up at Rome. This will be introduced into Germany as well.

[10: Monks who forsook their order without any legal dispensation were called "apostates."]

Thirdly, there are certain benefices that are said to be incompatible; that is, they may not be held together according to the canon law, such as two cures, two sees, and the like. Now the Holy See and avarice twists itself out of the canon law by making "glosses," or interpretations, called Unio, or Incorporatio; that is, several incompatible benefices are incorporated, so that one is a member of the other, and the whole is held to be one benefice: then they are no longer incompatible, and we have got rid of the holy canon law, so that it is no longer binding, except on those who do not buy those glosses of the Pope and his Datarius. [11] Unio is of the same kind: a number of benefices are tied together like a bundle of faggots, and on account of this coupling together they are held to be one benefice. Thus there may be found many a "courtling" at Rome who alone holds twenty-two cures, seven priories, and forty-four prebends, all which is done in virtue of this masterly gloss, so as not to be contrary to law. Any one can imagine what cardinals and other prelates may hold. In this way the Germans are to have their purses emptied and their conceit taken out of them.

[11: The papal office for the issue and registration of certain documents was called Dataria, from the phrase appended to them, Datum apud S. Petrum. The chief of that office, usually a cardinal, bore the title of Datarius, or Prodatarius.]

There is another gloss called *Administratio*; that is, that besides his see a man holds an abbey or other high benefice, and possesses all the property of it, without any other title but administrator. For at Rome it is enough that words should change, and not deeds, just as if I said, a procuress was to be called a mayoress, yet may remain as good as she is now. Such Romish rule was foretold by St. Peter, when he said, "There shall be false teachers among you, . . . and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you" (2 Peter ii. 1, 3).

This precious Roman avarice has also invented the practice of selling and lending prebends and benefices on condition that the seller or lender has the reversion, so that if the incumbent dies, the benefice falls to him that has sold it, lent it, or abandoned it; in this way they have made benefices heritable property, so that none can come to hold them unless the seller sells them to him, or leaves them to him at his death. Then there are many that give a benefice to another in name only, and on condition that he shall not receive a farthing. It is now, too, an old practice for a man to give another a benefice and to receive a certain annual sum, which proceeding was formerly called simony. And there are many other such little things which I cannot recount; and so they deal worse with the benefices than the heathens by the cross dealt with Christ's clothes.

But all this that I have spoken of is old and common at Rome. Their avarice has invented other device, which I hope will be the last and choke it. The Pope has made a noble discovery, called *Pectoralis Reservatio*, that is, "mental reservation"-*et proprius motus*, that is, "and his own will and power." The matter is managed in this way: Suppose a man obtains a benefice at Rome, which is confirmed to him in due form; then comes another, who brings money, or who has done some other service of which the less said the better, and requests the Pope to give him the same benefice: then the Pope will take it from the first and give it him. If you say, that is wrong, the Most Holy Father must then excuse himself, that he may not be openly blamed for having violated justice; and he says "that in his heart and mind he reserved his authority over the said benefice," whilst he never had heard or thought of the same in all his life. Thus he has devised a gloss which allows him in his proper person to lie and cheat and fool us all, and all this impudently and in open daylight, and nevertheless he claims to be the head of Christendom, letting the evil spirit rule him with manifest lies.

This wantonness and lying reservation of the popes has brought about an unutterable state of things at Rome. There is a buying and a selling, a changing, blustering and bargaining, cheating and lying, robbing and stealing, debauchery and villainy, and all kinds of contempt of God, that antichrist himself could not rule worse. Venice, Antwerp, Cairo, are nothing to this fair and market at Rome, except that there things are done with some reason and justice, whilst here things are done as the devil himself could wish. And out of this ocean a like virtue overflows all the world. Is it not natural that such people should dread a reformation and a free council, and should rather

embroil all kings and princes, than that their unity should bring about a council? Who would like his villainy to be exposed?

Finally, the Pope has built a special house for this fine traffic-that is, the house of the Datarius at Rome. Thither all must come that bargain in this way, for prebends and benefices; from him they must buy the glosses and obtain the right to practise such prime villainy. In former days it was fairly well at Rome, when justice had to be bought, or could only be put down by money; but now she has become so fastidious that she does not allow any one to commit villainies unless he has first bought the right to do it with great sums. If this is not a house of prostitution, worse than all houses of prostitution that can be conceived, I do not know what houses of prostitution really are.

If you bring money to this house, you can arrive at all that I have mentioned; and more than this, any sort of usury is made legitimate for money; property got by theft or robbery is here made legal. Here vows are annulled; here a monk obtains leave to quit his order; here priests can enter married life for money; here bastards can become legitimate; and dishonour and shame may arrive at high honours; all evil repute and disgrace is knighted and ennobled; here a marriage is suffered that is in a forbidden degree, or has some other defect. Oh, what a trafficking and plundering is there! one would think that the canon laws were only so many money-snares, from which he must free himself who would become a Christian man. Nay, here the devil becomes a saint, and a god besides. What heaven and earth might not do may be done by this house. Their ordinances are called compositions - compositions, forsooth! confusions rather. [12] Oh, what a poor treasury is the toll on the Rhine [13] compared with this holy house!

[12: Luther uses here the expressions *compositiones* and *confusiones* as a kind of pun.]

[13: Tolls were levied at many places along the Rhine.]

Let no one think that I say too much. It is all notorious, so that even at Rome they are forced to own that it is more terrible and worse than one can say. I have said and will say nothing of the infernal dregs of private vices. I only speak of well-known public matters, and yet my words do not suffice. Bishops, priests, and especially the doctors of the universities, who are paid to do it, ought to have unanimously written and exclaimed against it. Yea, if you will turn the leaf you will discover the truth.

I have still to give a farewell greeting. These treasures, that would have satisfied three mighty kings, were not enough for this unspeakable greed, and so they have made over and sold their traffic to Fugger [14] at Augsburg, so that the lending and buying and selling sees and benefices, and all this traffic in ecclesiastical property, has in the end come into the right hands, and spiritual and temporal matters have now become one business. Now I should like to know what the most cunning would devise for Romish greed to do that it has not done, except that Fugger might sell or pledge his two trades, that

have now become one. I think they must have come to the end of their devices. For what they have stolen and yet steal in all countries by bulls of indulgences, letters of confession, letters of dispensation, [15] and other confessionalia, all this I think mere bungling work, and much like playing toss with a devil in hell. Not that they produce little, for a mighty king could support himself by them; but they are as nothing compared to the other streams of revenue mentioned above. I will not now consider what has become of that indulgence money; I shall inquire into this another time, for Campofiore [16] and Belvedere [17] and some other places probably know something about it.

[14: The commercial house of Fugger was in those days the wealthiest in Europe.]

[15: Luther uses the word Butterbriefe, i. e., letters of indulgence allowing the enjoyment of butter, cheese, milk, etc., during Lent. They formed part only of the confessionalia, which granted various other indulgences.]

[16: A public place at Rome.]

[17: Part of the Vatican.]

Meanwhile, since this devilish state of things is not only an open robbery, deceit, and tyranny of the gates of hell, but also destroys Christianity body and soul, we are bound to use all our diligence to prevent this misery and destruction of Christendom. If we wish to fight the Turk, let us begin here, where they are worst. If we justly hang thieves and behead robbers, why do we leave the greed of Rome so unpunished, that is the greatest thief and robber that has appeared or can appear on earth, and does all this in the holy name of Christ and St. Peter? Who can suffer this and be silent about it? Almost everything that they possess has been stolen or got by robbery, as we learn from all histories. Why, the Pope never bought those great possessions, so as to be able to raise well-nigh ten hundred thousand ducats from his ecclesiastical offices, without counting his gold mines described above and his land. He did not inherit it from Christ and St. Peter; no one gave it or lent it him; he has not acquired it by prescription. Tell me, where can he have got it? You can learn from this what their object is when they send out legates to collect money to be used against the Turk.