

Luther, 1523:

On Secular Authority: how far does the Obedience owed to it extend?

(excerpt)

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1. Our first task is [to find] a firm grounding for secular law and the Sword, in order to remove any possible doubt about their being in the world as a result of God's will and ordinance. The passages [of Scripture] which provide that foundation are these: Romans, 12 [in fact 13.1-2]: 'Let every soul be subject to power and superiority'. For there is no power but from God and the power that exists everywhere is ordained by God. And whoever resists the power, resists God's ordinance. But whosoever resists God's ordinance shall receive condemnation on himself.' And again 1 Peter 2 [13-14]: 'Be subject to every kind of human order, whether it be to the king as the foremost, or governors as sent by him, as a vengeance on the wicked and a reward to the just.' The Sword and its law have existed from the beginning of the world. When Cain beat his brother Abel to death, he was terrified that he would be killed in turn. But God imposed a special prohibition, suspending [punishment by] the sword for Cain's sake: no one was to kill him. The only possible reason why Cain should have been afraid is that he had seen and heard from Adam that murderers should be killed. Furthermore, God re-instituted and confirmed [this command] in express words after the Flood when he says in Genesis 9 [6]: 'Whosoever sheds man's blood, by man let his blood be shed.' This cannot be interpreted as a reference to God [himself] inflicting suffering and punishment on murderers, since many of them, either because they repent or by favor, remain alive and die [naturally] without the sword. No: it refers to the right of the Sword: a murderer forfeits his life, and it is right that he should be killed by the sword. And if something prevents the law being enforced, or if the sword is dilatory and the murderer dies a natural death, that does not prove Scripture wrong. What Scripture says is that whosoever sheds man's blood, that person's blood ought to be shed by men. It is the fault of men if God's law is not carried out, just as other commandments of God are not obeyed either.

The Law of Moses afterwards confirmed this [command]: 'If a man should kill his neighbor out of malice, him shall you drag from my altar, to kill him' (Exodus 21 [14]). And again: 'A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a foot for a foot, a hand for a hand, a wound for a wound, a bruise for a bruise.' And what is more, Christ too confirms it when he said to Peter in the garden [of Gethsemane, Matt. 26:52]: 'Whoever takes up the sword shall perish by the sword', which is to be understood in the same sense as Genesis 9[6]: 'Whoever sheds man's blood etc.'; there is no doubt that Christ is here invoking those words, and wishes to have this commandment introduced and confirmed [in the New Covenant]. John the Baptist teaches the same [Luke 3:14].

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When the soldiers asked him what they were to do, he told them: 'Do no violence or injustice to anyone and be content with your pay.' If the Sword were not an occupation approved by God, John ought to have commanded them to cease to be soldiers, all the more since [his vocation] was to make the people perfect and to teach them in a true Christian manner. How the secular Sword and law are to be employed according to God's will is thus clear and certain enough: to punish the wicked and protect the just.

2. But what Christ says in Matthew 5 [38 & 9] sounds as if it were emphatically opposed to this: 'You have heard what was said to your ancestors: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you: resist no evil. Rather, if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn him the other cheek. And if someone will dispute with you at law, to take your coat, let him have your cloak also. And if a man should compel you to go with him one mile, go two miles etc.' To the same effect, Paul in Romans 12 [19]: 'Dearly beloved, do not defend yourselves, but rather give place unto the wrath of God. For it is written: Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.' And again, Matthew 5 [44]: 'Love your enemies. Do good unto them that hate you.' And 1 Peter 2 [error for 3:9]: 'No one shall render evil for evil, or insults for insults etc.' These and others of the same sort are hard sayings, and sound as if Christians in the New Covenant were to have no secular Sword.

This is why the sophists say that Christ has abolished the Law of Moses, and why they make [mere] 'counsels of perfection' out of such commands. They then divide up Christian doctrine and the Christian estate into two parts. The one part they call 'those who are perfect', and to this they allot the 'counsels', the other part they term 'the imperfect' and to them they allot the commands. But this is pure effrontery and wilfulness, without any warrant from Scripture. They fail to notice that in that very place Christ imposes his teachings so emphatically, that he will not have the slightest thing removed from it, and condemns to hell those who do not love their enemies [Matt. 5:22ff]. We must therefore interpret him in another way, so that his words continue to apply to all, be they 'perfect' or 'imperfect'. For perfection and imperfection do not inhere in works, and do not establish any distinction in outward condition or status between Christians; rather, they inhere in the heart, in faith, in love, so that whoever believes more [firmly] and loves more, that person is perfect, irrespective of whether it be a man or a woman, a prince or a peasant, monk or layman. For love and faith create no factions and no outward distinctions.

3. Here we must divide Adam's children, all mankind, into two parts: the first belong to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world. All those who truly believe in Christ belong to God's kingdom, for Christ is king and lord in God's kingdom, as the second Psalm [v. 6] and the whole of Scripture proclaims. And Christ came in order to begin the kingdom of God and to establish it in the world. This is why he said before Pilate [John 18.36ff]: 'My kingdom is not of this world, but whoever belongs to the truth hears my voice', and why throughout the Gospel he announces the kingdom of God, saying [Matt. 3.2]: 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand', and again [Matt. 6.33]: 'Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness.' And indeed he calls the Gospel a gospel of the kingdom of God, in that it teaches, governs and preserves the kingdom of God. Now: these people need neither secular [weltlich] Sword nor law. And if all the world [Welt] were true Christians, that is, if everyone truly believed, there would

be neither need nor use for princes, kings, lords, the Sword or law. What would there be for them to do.' Seeing that [true Christians] have the Holy Spirit in their hearts, which teaches and moves them to love everyone, wrong no one, and suffer wrongs gladly, even unto death. Where all wrongs are endured willingly and what is right' is done freely, there is no place for quarrelling, disputes, courts, punishments, laws or the Sword. And therefore laws and the secular Sword cannot possibly find any work to do among Christians, especially since they of themselves do much more than any laws or teachings might demand. As Paul says in 1 Tim. 1[9]: 'Laws are not given to the just, but to the unjust.' Why should this be? It is because the just man [der Gerechte] of his own accord does all and more than any law' [Recht] demands. But the unjust [Ungerechten] do nothing that is right [recht], and therefore they need the law to teach, compel and urge them to act rightly. A good tree needs no teaching and no law in order for it to bear good fruit; it is its nature to do so without teaching or law. A man would have to be an idiot to write a book of laws for an apple-tree telling it to bear apples and not thorns, seeing that the apple-tree will do it naturally and far better than any laws or teaching can prescribe. In the same way, because of the spirit and faith, the nature of all Christians is such that they act well and rightly, better than any laws can teach them, and therefore they have no need of any laws for themselves. You will reply: 'Why then has God given all mankind so many laws and why has Christ in the Gospel taught so much about what we ought to do!' I have written at length about this in my 'Postil' and elsewhere and therefore I shall state the matter very briefly. St. Paul says that the law is given for the sake of the unjust. In other words, those who are not Christians are constrained by laws to refrain outwardly from wicked deeds, as we shall see below. But since no man is by nature a Christian or just, but all are sinners and evil, God hinders them all, by means of the law, from doing as they please and expressing their wickedness outwardly in actions. And St. Paul assigns another task to the law in Romans 7[7], and Galatians 2 [in fact 3:19 and 24]: it teaches how sin may be recognized, so as to humble man into a willingness to accept grace and faith in Christ. Christ teaches the same in Matthew 5[39]: evil is not to be resisted. Here he is explaining the law and is teaching us the nature of a true Christian, as we shall hear below.

4. All those who are not Christians [in the above sense] belong to the kingdom of the world or [in other words] are under the law. There are few who believe, and even fewer who behave like Christians and refrain from doing evil [themselves], let alone not resisting evil [done to them]. And for the rest God has established another government, outside the Christian estate and the kingdom of God, and has cast them into subjection to the Sword. So that, however much they would like to do evil, they are unable to act in accordance with their inclinations, or, if they do, they cannot do so without fear, or enjoy peace and good fortune. In the same way, a wicked, fierce animal is chained and bound so that it cannot bite or tear, as its nature would prompt it to do, however much it wants to; whereas a tame, gentle animal needs nothing like chains or bonds and is harmless even without them. If there were [no law and government], then seeing that all the world is evil and that scarcely one human being in a thousand is a true Christian, people would devour each other and no one would be able to support his wife and children, feed himself and serve God. The world [Welt] would become a desert. And so God has ordained the two governments, the spiritual [government] which fashions true Christians and just persons through the Holy Spirit under Christ, and the secular [weltlich] government which holds the Unchristian

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and wicked in check and forces them to keep the peace outwardly and be still, like it or not. It is in this way that St. Paul interprets the secular Sword when he says in Romans 13 [3]: 'It [the Sword] is not a terror to good works, but to the wicked.' And Peter says [1 Pet. 2:14]: 'It is given as a punishment on the wicked.'

If someone wanted to have the world ruled according to the Gospel, and to abolish all secular law and the Sword, on the ground that all are baptized and Christians and that the Gospel will have no law or sword used among Christians, who have no need of them [in any case], what do you imagine the effect would be? He would let loose the wild animals from their bonds and chains, and let them maul and tear everyone to pieces, saying all the while that really they are just fine, tame, gentle, little things. But my wounds would tell me different. And so the wicked under cover of the name of Christians, would misuse the freedom of the Gospel, would work their wickedness and would claim that they are Christians and [therefore] subject to no law and no Sword. Some of them are raving like this already.

Such a person must be told that it is of course true that Christians are subject to neither the law nor the Sword for their own sake, and do not need them. But before you rule the world in the Christian and Gospel manner, be sure to fill it with true Christians. And that you will never do, because the world and the many are unchristian and will remain so, whether they are made up of baptized and nominal Christians or not. But Christians, as the saying goes, are few and far between, and the world will not tolerate a Christian government ruling over one land or a great multitude, let alone over the whole world. There are always many more of the wicked than there are of the just. And so to try to rule a whole country or the world by means of the Gospel is like herding together wolves, lions, eagles and sheep in the same pen, letting them mix freely, and saying to them: feed, and be just and peaceable; the stable isn't locked, there's plenty of pasture, and you have no dogs or cudgels to be afraid of. The sheep would certainly keep the peace and let themselves be governed and pastured peaceably, but they would not live long.

Therefore care must be taken to keep these two governments distinct, and both must be allowed to continue [their work], the one to make [people] just, the other to create outward peace and prevent evildoing. Neither is enough for the world without the other. Without the spiritual government of Christ, no one can be made just in the sight of God by the secular government [alone]. However, Christ's spiritual government does not extend to everyone; on the contrary, Christians are at all times the fewest in number and live in the midst of the Unchristian. Conversely, where the secular government or law rules on its own, pure hypocrisy must prevail, even if it were God's own commandments [that were being enforced]. For no one becomes truly just without the Holy Spirit in his heart, however good his works. And equally where the spiritual government rules over a country and its people unaided, every sort of wickedness is let loose and every sort of knavery has free play. For the world in general is incapable of accepting it or understanding it [i.e. the spiritual government].

You can now see the implication of the words of Christ which we cited earlier from Matthew 5 [39], that Christians are not to go to law or use the secular Sword amongst themselves. This is

really only said to the Christians he loves, and it is only they that accept it and act accordingly, rather than reducing it to mere 'counsels', like the sophists. On the contrary, such is the character that the Holy Spirit has imparted to their hearts, that they do harm to no one, but rather suffer it willingly at the hands of anyone else. Now if all the world were Christian, these words would apply to them all and they would all act accordingly. But since they are unchristian, the words have nothing to do with them, and neither do they follow them. Instead they belong under the other [i.e. secular] government, by which the Unchristian are outwardly constrained and forced to behave peaceably and well.

For the same reason Christ did not bear the Sword [in person], or institute it in his kingdom: he is king over Christians and rules by his Holy Spirit alone, without any laws. And even though he confirmed [the legitimacy of] the Sword, he himself made no use of it, for it does not advance his kingdom, which contains none but the just. It is for this same reason that in the old days David was not permitted to build the Temple, for he had borne the Sword and shed much blood. Not that he had done wrong thereby, but he could not prefigure Christ, who will have a peaceful kingdom without the Sword. Instead, Solomon must do it ['Solomon', 'Frederick' in German, means peaceable, peaceful]; for Solomon had a peaceful kingdom, which could therefore be the emblem of the peaceful kingdom of Christ, the true Solomon. And again, during the whole time the Temple was built, says the Scripture, there was heard no sound of iron; all this because Christ wanted a free, willing people without coercion or constraint, law or Sword [1 Kings 6:7].

This is what is meant by the prophets: Psalm 109 [possibly Ps. 110:3]: 'Thy people shall be those who are willing', and Isaiah 11[9]: 'They shall not kill or harm on all my holy mountain' (in other words the Church). And Isaiah 2[4]: 'They shall make their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles; and no one shall raise a sword against another; and they shall study fighting no more etc.' Those who want to extend the meaning of these and similar sayings to make them cover all who call themselves Christians would be perverting [the meaning of] Scripture, for these things are said only of the true Christians, who do in fact act in this way towards each other.

5. You will object here: seeing that Christians need neither the secular Sword nor law, why does Paul in Romans 13 [1] say to all Christians: 'Let every soul be subject to power' and superiority! And St. Peter [1 Pet. 2:13]: 'Be subject to every human ordinance etc.', as cited above. My answer is: I have already said that Christians among themselves and for themselves need no law and no Sword, for they have no use for them. But because a true Christian, while he is on the earth, lives for and serves his neighbor and not himself, he does things that are of no benefit to himself, but of which his neighbor stands in need. Such is the nature of the Christian's spirit. Now the Sword is indispensable for the whole world, to preserve peace, punish sin, and restrain the wicked. And therefore Christians readily submit them selves to be governed by the Sword, they pay taxes, honor those in authority, serve and help them, and do what they can to uphold their power, so that they may continue their work, and that honor and fear of authority may be maintained. [All this] even though Christians do not need it for themselves, but they attend to what others need, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 5[21].

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In the same way, the Christian performs every other work of love that he does not require for himself. He visits the sick, but not in order to become well himself. He does not feed others because he needs food for himself. And neither does he serve authority because he himself stands in need of it, but because others do, in order that they might enjoy protection, and so that the wicked might not grow even worse. Such service does no harm to him, and he suffers no loss by it, but the world benefits greatly. To omit to do it would not be the act of a Christian; it would be contrary to [the Christian duty of] love, and would give a bad example to [the Unchristian]: they too would refuse to submit to authority, although they are unchristian. And all this would bring the Gospel into disrepute, as if it taught rebellion and created selfish people unwilling to be of use or service to anyone, whereas the Gospel makes the Christian a servant to everyone. Thus Christ in Matthew 17[27] paid the tax, although he had no need to do so, in order not to give offense.

And so in the words quoted above from Matthew 5[39], you do indeed find Christ teaching that those who are his are to have no secular Sword or law among themselves. But he does not forbid them to serve and be subject to those who do have the secular Sword and laws. On the contrary, precisely because you do not need it and are not to have it, you ought to serve those who have not reached the same [spiritual] level as you and do still need it. Although you yourself do not need your enemy to be punished, your weak neighbor does, and you are to help him to enjoy peace and to see to it that his enemies are kept in check. And that cannot be unless power and superiors are held in honor and awe. The words of Christ are not: you are not to serve the power, nor be subject to it; but rather: 'you shall not resist evil', as if to say: so conduct yourself as to suffer all things, so that you have no need for those in power to help or serve or be of use to you; on the contrary, you are to help, serve and be indispensable to them. I will have you be of such a noble and honorable status as not to need them; rather they shall need you.

6. You ask whether a Christian can even wield the secular Sword and punish the wicked [himself], seeing that Christ's words 'Do not resist evil' seem so peremptory and clear that the sophists have to water them down into a mere 'counsel'. Answer, 'you have now heard two [conflicting] things. One is that there can be no Sword amongst Christians. And therefore you cannot bear the Sword over or among Christians. So the question is irrelevant in that context and must instead be asked in connection with the other group [the Unchristian]: can a Christian use be made of it with regard to them? This is where the second part [of what I have said] applies, the one that says that you owe the Sword your service and support, by whatever means are available to you, be it with your body, goods, honor or soul. For this is a work of which you yourself have no need, but your neighbor and the whole world most certainly do. And therefore if you see that there is a lack of hangmen, court officials, judges, lords or princes, and you find that you have the necessary skills, then you should offer your services and seek office, so that authority, which is so greatly needed, will never come to be held in contempt, become powerless, or perish. The world cannot get by without it.

How does this resolve the difficulty? In this way: all such actions would be devoted wholly to the service of others; they would benefit only your neighbor and not you or your possessions and

honor. You would not be aiming at revenge [for yourself], at repaying evil with evil, but rather at the good of your neighbors, the preservation, protection and peace of others. As far as you yourself and your possessions are concerned, you keep to the Gospel and act according to Christ's word; you would gladly turn the other cheek and give up your cloak as well as your coat, when it is you and your possessions that are involved.

And so the two are nicely reconciled: you satisfy the demands of God's kingdom and the world's at one and the same time, outwardly and inwardly; you both suffer evil and injustice and yet punish them; you do not resist evil and yet you do resist it. For you attend to yourself and what is yours in one way, and to your neighbor and what is his in another. As to you and yours, you keep to the Gospel and suffer injustice as a true Christian. But where the next man and what is his are concerned, you act in accordance with the [command to] love and you tolerate no injustice against him. And that is not prohibited by the Gospel; on the contrary the Gospel commands it elsewhere [cf Romans 13:4]. It is in this way that all the saints have borne the Sword from the beginning of the world: Adam and his descendants, Abraham when he saved Lot, his brother's son, and slew the four kings (Genesis 14[13-16]); and surely Abraham typifies the whole Gospel! This is how the holy prophet Samuel slew King Agag (1 Samuel 15 [32ff]) and Elias the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18[40]). And Moses, Joshua, the Children of Israel, Samson, David and all the kings and princes of the Old Testament acted in the same way. So did Daniel and his companions Ananias, Asarias and Mishael in Babylon; so did Joseph in Egypt and so forth.

Some would claim here that the Old Covenant is abolished and no longer valid and that there is therefore no point in rehearsing these examples to Christians. Not so. For St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10[3]: 'They have eaten the same spiritual food as we, and have drunk the same spiritual drink from the rock which is Christ.' That is: they had the same spirit and faith in Christ that we have, and were just as much Christians as we are. And what it was right for them to do is right for all Christians, from the beginning to the end of the world. For time and outward changes make no difference among Christians. Nor is it true that the Old Covenant has been abolished, so that it need not be kept, or that it is wrong to keep it ? a point on which St. Jerome and many others have slipped up. Rather, this is the way in which the Old Covenant has been abolished: doing or omitting are left free, and no longer bind on pain of losing our souls, as they did formerly. For St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7[19] and Galatians 6[15]: 'Neither uncircumcision nor circumcision are anything; rather: a new creation in Christ.' That is: it is no sin to be uncircumcised, [contrary to what] the Jews thought, neither is it a sin to be circumcised, as the pagans thought, but both are equally good and equally left to our discretion, as long as whoever does them does not think he will be justified or saved thereby. The same is true of all the other parts of the Old Covenant: it is neither wrong to omit, nor wrong to do, but everything is left as free and good, to be done or omitted. And in fact, were it a question of what is necessary or conducive to the salvation of our neighbor's soul, it would be obligatory to keep them all. Everyone has a duty to do what is necessary for his neighbor, irrespective of whether it is under the Old or the New Covenant, be it something Jewish or pagan, as St. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12[13]: 'Love penetrates everything and transcends everything, and looks only to the need and advantage of others, but does not ask whether it is old or new.' The same goes for the

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examples of the [use of the] Sword. You are free to follow them or not. But when you see your neighbor in need, then love obliges you to do what would otherwise be left free to do or omit. Only do not imagine that your actions will justify or save you, as the Jews had the audacity to think; rather leave that to faith, which makes you into a new creation without works.

But to prove my point from the New Testament as well, we can rely on John the Baptist (Luke 3[15]), whose duty was without a doubt to witness to, show forth, and teach Christ; that is, his doctrine was to be evangelical, the pure New Testament, and he was to lead a perfect people to Christ. John confirms the office of soldier, saying that they are to be content with their pay. If it were unchristian to bear the sword, he should have punished them and told them to throw away both their swords and their pay; otherwise he would not have been teaching them what is fitting for Christians. And when St. Peter in Acts 10[34ff] was teaching Cornelius about Christ, he did not tell him to abandon his office, as he should have done if it had been a hindrance to Cornelius' [attaining] the status of a Christian. Furthermore, before [Cornelius] was baptized [Acts 10:44], the Holy Spirit descended on him. And St. Luke praised him as a just man [Acts 10:2] before Peter taught him, and did not find fault with him for being a commander of soldiers and a captain of the pagan Emperor. What it was right for the Holy Spirit to leave unchanged and unpunished in Cornelius is equally right for us. The same example is given to us by the Ethiopian eunuch, a captain, in Acts 8 [27ff], whom the evangelist Philip converted and baptized and then allowed to retain his office and return home. [The Ethiopian] could hardly have held such a powerful office under the Queen of Ethiopia without bearing the sword. The same is true of the Governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13[7,12]), whom St. Paul converted and yet allowed to remain governor among and over pagans. And the same was done by many holy martyrs, who were obedient to the pagan emperors of Rome, went into battle under them and no doubt killed people to keep the peace, as is written of St. Maurice, St. Achatius and St. Gereon, and of many others under the Emperor Julian [the Apostate]. But more important than all these is the clear, strong text (Romans 13[1]), where St. Paul says: 'Power is the ordinance of God.' And again: 'Those in power do not bear the sword in vain. For power is the handmaiden of God, his avenger for your good against him that does evil' [Romans 13:4]. My dear brother, do not presume to say that the Christian must not do what is in fact God's own work, ordinance and creation. Otherwise you would also have to say that the Christian must not eat, drink, or marry, for these too are God's works and ordinances. And since they are, they are good, and equally it is good for everyone to make a Christian use of them, as St. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4[4]: 'Everything created by God is good, and not to be rejected by the faithful and those who recognize the truth.' And you must count not only food and drink, clothes and shoes, but also power and subordination, protection and punishment, as things created by God.

So to cut a long story short: because St. Paul says that power is the handmaiden of God, its use must be allowed not only to pagans but to all mankind. For what can it mean to say that power is the handmaiden of God, if not that it is by nature something which can be used to serve God. It would be wholly unchristian to say that there is anything which serves God and which yet a Christian should not do, for there is no one more suited to serving God than a Christian. In the same way it is right and necessary that all princes should be good Christians. The Sword and

power, as a special service rendered to God, are more suited to Christians than to anyone else in the world, and so you should value the Sword and power as much as the married state, or cultivating the soil, or any other trade instituted by God. Just as a man can serve God in the married state, in farming or manual labor, for the benefit of his neighbor, and indeed must do so if his neighbor's need demands it, so too he can serve God by the [exercise of] power, and he ought to do it, when his neighbor needs it. For those are God's servants and laborers who punish evil and protect what is good. But this is to be left to free choice where there is no [absolute] need, just as marrying and engaging in farming are also left to people's choice, where there is no [absolute] need.

If you then ask: why did Christ and the Apostles not exercise power! my answer is: why did not [Christ] take a wife, or become a cobbler or tailor? Are we to think that a status or occupation is not good merely because Christ did not have it himself? In that case, what would happen to every status and occupation except that of preacher, since that was the only one he held? Christ occupied the office and status proper to him, but in doing so he did not condemn any other. It was not fitting for him to bear the Sword, for his only office was to be that of ruling his kingdom and whatever serves that kingdom alone. And it did not pertain to his kingship' to become a husband, cobbler, tailor, plough-man, prince, hangman, or beadle; nor again to bear the Sword or [make] secular laws; all that did pertain to it was God's Word and spirit by which his own are governed, inwardly. And the office he held then and continues to hold now is always bestowed by the spirit and God's Word. And the apostles and all spiritual governors were to succeed him in that office. That work, the work of the spiritual Sword, the Word of God, will give them so much to do, if they are to do it properly, that they will have to neglect the secular Sword and leave it to others who do not have to attend to preaching, even though it is not incompatible with their status to do so, as has been said. For everyone must attend to his own calling and work.

And so, even though Christ did not bear or teach the Sword himself, it is enough that he did not forbid or abolish it but rather confirmed it, just as it is enough that he did not abolish the married state but confirmed it, albeit he himself took no wife and taught nothing about it. For the task appropriate to his status was to concern himself wholly with that work which specifically served his kingdom and nothing else, to prevent his example being treated as a binding reason for teaching and believing that God's kingdom could not continue without marriage or the Sword or suchlike outward things, whereas that kingdom subsists by God's Word and spirit alone. (For Christ's example compels imitation.) Christ's own office was and had to be that of the most high king in this same kingdom. And since not all Christians have the same office (even though they could have it), it is right and fitting that they should have some other external [office], by which God may also be served.

From all this it follows that the right interpretation of Christ's words in Matthew 5[39]: 'You shall not resist evil etc.' is that Christians should be capable of suffering every evil and injustice, not avenging themselves, and not going to court in self-defense either. On the contrary they will require nothing at all for themselves from secular authority and laws [Recht]. But they may seek retribution, justice [Recht], protection and help for others, and do whatever they want to that end.

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And those in power' for their part should help and protect them, either on their own initiative, or at the behest of others, even though the Christians themselves lodge no complaint, and do not petition or institute proceedings. Where [the secular authorities] fail to do so, the Christian should allow himself to be abused and maltreated, and should not resist evil, just as Christ's Word says.

But you may be sure of this: this teaching of Christ is not a 'counsel for the perfect', as our blaspheming and lying sophists will have it, but a strict injunction to every Christian. And rest assured that those who avenge themselves and litigate and quarrel in the courts for their goods and honor are mere pagans bearing the name of Christians, and will never be anything else. Pay no attention to the common run of people and what they usually do. Make no mistake about it: there are few Christians on earth. And God's command is something different from what is usually done. You can see here that Christ did not abolish the Law when he said: 'You have heard how it was said to your ancestors: an eye for an eye. But I say to you: you shall not resist evil etc.' [Matthew 5:38f]. Rather, he is interpreting the meaning of the Law and telling us how it ought to be understood, as if to say: you Jews think that it is right and proper in the sight of God for you to recover what is yours by [recourse to] the law, and you rely on Moses saying 'an eye for an eye etc.' But I say to you that Moses gave this law on account of the wicked, who do not belong to God's kingdom, to prevent them from taking revenge themselves or doing worse. By such externally imposed law they would be compelled to desist from evil, and would be hedged about by outward law and government, and subjected to authority. But you are so to conduct yourselves that you neither need nor seek such law. For although secular authority must have such laws, to judge the unbelieving, and even though you yourselves may make use of it to judge others, all the same for yourselves and in your own affairs you are neither to resort to it nor to use it, for you have the kingdom of heaven and you should leave the earthly kingdom [Erdreich] to those who take it from you.

You see, then, that Christ did not interpret his [own] words as abolishing the Law of Moses or as prohibiting secular authority. Rather he withdraws those who are his own from it, so that they will make no use of it for themselves, but leave it for the unbelievers, whom they may indeed serve with such laws, since the Unchristian do exist, and no one can be made a true Christian by compulsion. But it becomes clear that Christ's words are directed to his alone when he says somewhat later that they are to love their enemies and to be perfect, as their heavenly father is perfect [Matt. 5:44,48]. But a man who is perfect and loves his enemy, leaves the law behind; he does not need it to exact an eye for an eye. But neither does he hinder the Unchristian who do not love their enemy and who do want to employ the law; on the contrary, he helps the law to catch the wicked, to prevent them doing still more wickedness.

This, in my view, is how the words of Christ are reconciled with those texts that institute the Sword. What they mean is that Christians are neither to employ nor to call on the Sword for themselves and in their own concerns. But they may and should use it and call on it for the sake of others, so that evil maybe prevented and justice upheld. In just the same way the Lord says in the same place that Christians shall not take oaths, but that their speech is to be yea, yea and nay,

nay [Matt. 5.34ff]. In other words, they are not to take oaths on their own behalf or of their own will and inclination. But when the necessity, benefit and salvation [of others] or the honor of God demands it, they should take oaths. They make use of the [otherwise] forbidden oath to help others, in precisely the same way that they use the prohibited sword. Indeed Christ and Paul themselves often swear on oath, in order to make their teaching and witness beneficial and credible to mankind, as people do, and are allowed to do, in those treaties and compacts of which the 62nd Psalm [in fact 63 v. 12] speaks: 'They are praised, who swear by his name.'

A further question that arises is whether beadle, hangmen, lawyers, advocates and all the rest of their sort can be Christians and in a state" of grace? The answer is that if government [die Gewalt] and the Sword serve God, as has been shown above, then everything that government needs in order to bear the Sword, is equally a service to God. There has to be someone to catch the wicked, to accuse them, and execute them, and to protect, acquit, defend and save the good. And therefore if the intention of those who carry out these tasks is not that of looking to their own advantage, but only of helping to uphold the laws and authorities, in order to repress the wicked, then there is no danger in it for them, and they can do it like any other job, and get their living by it. As has already been said, love of one's neighbor has no regard for self, neither does it consider whether what is to be done is important or trivial, so long as it is for the good of one's neighbor or the community.

Finally, you might ask: can't I use the Sword for myself and my own concerns, provided I am not out for my own good, but merely intend that evil should be punished? My answer is that such a miracle is not impossible, but very unusual and dangerous. It may happen where the Spirit is present in great fullness. We do indeed read in Judges 15[11i] that Samson said: 'I have done unto them as they did unto me,' But against this is Proverbs 24[29]: 'Do not say: I will do unto him, as he has done unto me.' And Proverbs 20[22]: 'Do not say: I will repay his wickedness.' Samson was required by God to plague the Philistines and save the children of Israel. And even though he used his private concerns as a pretext for declaring war against them, he nevertheless did not do it to avenge himself or to seek his own advantage, but to help [the Israelites] and punish the Philistines. But no one can follow this precedent unless he be a true Christian, filled with the [Holy] Spirit. Where [ordinary human] reason wants to do likewise, it no doubt pretends that it is not seeking its own advantage, but the claim will be false from top to bottom. The thing is impossible without grace. So if you want to act like Samson, then first become like Samson.

Part Two

How far secular authority extends

We now come to the main part of this sermon. We have learnt that there must be secular authority on this earth and how a Christian and salutary use may be made of it. Now we must establish how long its reach is, and how far it may stretch out its arm without overreaching itself and trenching upon God's kingdom' and government. This is something about which we need to be quite clear. When [secular government] is given too much freedom of action, the harm that results is unbearable and horrifying, but to have it confined within too narrow a compass is also

harmful. In the one case there is too much punishment, in the other too little. But it is more tolerable to err on the side of the latter: it is always better that a villain should live than that a just' man should be killed, There always are, and always must be, villains in the world, but there are few just men.

The first point to be noted is that the two parts into which the children of Adam are divided (as we have said above), the one the kingdom of God' under Christ, the other the kingdom of the world' under [secular] authority', have each their own kind of law'. Everyday experience sufficiently shows us that every kingdom must have its own laws and that no kingdom or government can survive without law. Secular government has laws that extend no further than the body, goods and outward, earthly' matters. But where the soul is concerned, God neither can nor will allow anyone but himself to rule. And so, where secular authority takes it upon itself to legislate for the soul, it trespasses on [what belongs to] God's government, and merely seduces and ruins souls. I intend to make this so unambiguously clear that no one can fail to grasp it, in order that our lords the princes and bishops may see the folly of trying to compel belief in this or that by means of laws and commands.

If someone imposes a man-made law on souls, compelling belief in what he wants to be believed, then there will probably be no word of God to justify it. If there is nothing in God's Word about it, then it is uncertain whether this is what God wants. If he himself has not commanded something, there is no way of establishing that it is pleasing to him. Or rather, we can be sure that it is not pleasing to him, for he will have our faith grounded solely in his divine Word; as he says in Matthew 18 [in fact 16:18]: 'On this rock I will build my church.' And John 10[27]: 'My sheep hear my voice and know me, but the strangers' voice they hear not, but flee from them.' From this it follows that secular authority drives souls to eternal damnation with such blasphemous commands. For this is to compel people to believe that something is certain to please God, when it is not certain at all; on the contrary, it is certain that it displeases God, since there is no clear [text in] God's Word to warrant it. For whosoever believes something to be right, which is in fact wrong or uncertain, denies the truth, which is God himself, and believes lies and error...

It is therefore utter folly for them to order us to believe the Church, the [Church] Fathers and the Councils, even though there is no [express] Word of God [for what they tell us to believe]. It is the apostles of the devil that issue that sort of command, not the Church. The Church commands nothing except what it is certain is God's Word. As St. Peter says [1 Pet. 4:11]: 'Whoever speaks, let him speak according to God's word.' But they will never be able to show that the decrees of Councils are the Word of God. And what is even more ridiculous is when it is argued that, after all, this is what kings and princes and people generally believe. But, my friends, we are not baptized in the name of kings and princes and people in general, but in the name of Christ and of God himself. And our title is not 'kings' or 'princes' or 'people in general', but Christians. No one can or should lay down commandments for the soul, except those who can point it on the way to heaven. But no human being can do that; only God. And therefore in those things which concern the salvation of souls, nothing is to be taught or accepted except God's Word.

Another important point is this. However stupid they are, they must admit that they have no power over the soul. For no human being can kill the soul or bring it to life, or lead it to heaven or to hell. And if they will not believe us, then Christ will show it clearly enough when he says in Matthew 10[28]: 'Do not be afraid of those that kill the body and after that can do nothing more. Fear rather him who, after he kills the body, has the power to condemn to hell.' Surely that is clear enough: the soul is taken out of the hands of any human being whatsoever, and is placed exclusively under the power of God. Now tell me this: would anyone in his right mind give orders where he has no authority? You might as well command the moon to shine at your behest. What sense would there be in it, if the people of Leipzig were to lay down laws for us here in Wittenberg, or vice versa? Anyone who tried it, would be sent a dose of hellebore by way of thanks, to clear their heads and cure their cold. But this is just what our Emperor and our prudent princes are doing; they let the Pope, the bishops and the sophists lead them, the blind leading the blind, commanding their subjects to believe as they see fit, without God's Word. And then they still want to retain the title of 'Christian Princes', which God forbid.

Another way of understanding this point is that each and every authority can only act, and ought only to act, where it can see, know, judge, adjudicate and change things. What kind of judge would it be that judges blindly in matters where he can neither hear nor see? But tell me this: how can a human being see, know, judge and change hearts? That is reserved to God alone. As Psalm 7[10] says: 'God searches the heart and bowels.' And again [Ps. 7:9]: 'The Lord is judge over the people', and Acts 10 [in fact 1:24; 15:8]: 'God knows the heart.' And Jeremiah 1 [in fact 17:9]: 'Wicked and unsearchable is the human heart. Who can search it.' I the Lord, who search hearts and bowels.' A court has to have an exact knowledge of what it is to judge. But people's thoughts and minds cannot be manifest to anyone but God. And therefore it is impossible and futile to command or coerce someone to believe this or that. A different skill is needed here; force' will not do. I am surprised at these lunatics, seeing that they themselves have a saying: *De occultis non iudicat ecclesia*; the Church does not judge in secret matters. Now, if [even] the Church, the spiritual government, only rules over matters that are public and open, by what right does secular authority, in its folly, presume to judge a thing as secret, spiritual, hidden as faith?

Each must decide at his own peril what he is to believe, and must see to it that he believes rightly. Other people cannot go to heaven or hell on my behalf, or open or close [the gates to either] for me. And just as little can they believe or not believe on my behalf, or force my faith or unbelief. How he believes is a matter for each individual's conscience, and this does not diminish [the authority of] secular governments. They ought therefore to content themselves with attending to their own business, and allow people to believe what they can, and what they want, and they must use no coercion in this matter against anyone. Faith is free, and no one can be compelled to believe. More precisely, so far from being something secular authority ought to create and enforce, faith is something that God works in the spirit. Hence that common saying which also occurs in Augustine: no one can or ought to be forced to believe anything against his will.

Those blind and wretched people do not realize what a pointless and impossible thing they are attempting. However strict their orders, and however much they rage, they cannot force people to do more than obey by word and [outward] deed; they cannot compel the heart, even if they were to tear themselves apart trying. There is truth in the saying: Thought is free. What is the effect of their trying to force people to believe in their hearts! All they achieve is to force people with weak consciences to lie, to perjure themselves, saying one thing while in their hearts they believe another. And in this way [rulers] load on themselves the horrifying sins done by others, because all the lies and perjuries such [people with] weak consciences utter, when they are spoken under compulsion, fall back on the one who compels their being done. It would be much easier, although it may mean allowing their subjects to fall into error, just to let them err, rather than to force them to lie and profess [with their mouths] what they do not believe in their hearts. And it is not right to prevent one evil by doing another, even worse, one.

Do you want to know why God has ordained that the secular princes must come to grief in this horrible fashion? I'll tell you. God has given them perverse minds, and he means to make an end of them, just as he will make an end of their Spiritual Lordships. For my ungracious lords, the pope and bishops, should be [real] bishops and preach the Word of God; but they have left off doing so and have become secular princes, ruling by means of laws that concern only life and goods. They have managed to turn everything upside down: they ought to rule souls with God's Word, inwardly, and instead they rule castles, towns, countries and peoples, outwardly, and torment souls with unspeakable murders. And the secular lords, who should rule countries and peoples outwardly, do not do so either; instead, the only thing they know how to do is to poll and fleece, heap one tax on another, let loose a bear here, a wolf there. There is no good faith or honesty to be found amongst them; thieves and villains behave better than they do, and secular government is sunk as low as the government of the spiritual tyrants. God has made them to be of perverse minds and has deprived them of their senses, so that they want to rule spiritually over souls, just as the spiritual authorities want to rule in a worldly' manner. And [God's purpose in all this is] that they should thoughtlessly pile up on themselves the sins of others, earn his hatred and that of mankind, until they are ruined along with bishops, parsons and monks, all knaves together. And then they blame everything on the Gospel, blaspheming God instead of confessing their guilt, and saying that it is our preaching that has done this, whereas it is their perverse wickedness that has brought it on them, and they deserved it and continue to deserve it; the Romans said just the same, when they were destroyed. And here you have God's judgment on these great men. But they do not realize it, in order that God's grave counsels may not be frustrated by their repentance.

But you will reply: doesn't St. Paul say in Romans 13[1]: 'Let every soul be subject to power and superiority'? And Peter, that we are to be subject to every human ordinance? [1 Pet. 2:13]? You are quite right, and this is grist to my mill. St. Paul is speaking of superiors and power. But I have just shown that no one has power over the soul except God. St. Paul cannot be speaking of obedience where there is no power [entitled to obedience]. It follows that he is not talking about faith and is not saying that worldly authority ought to have the right to command faith. What he is talking about is outward goods, about commanding and ruling on earth. And he makes clear

that this is what he means when he lays down a limit to both power and obedience: 'Give to each what is due to him, tax where tax is due, customs duties where customs duties are due, honor where honor, fear where fear' [Romans 13.7]. In other words secular obedience and power extend only to taxes, duties, honor, fear, outward things. To the same effect: 'Power is not a terror to good, but to wicked works' [Romans 13.3]. He is setting a limit to power: it is not to have mastery over faith and God's Word, but over evil-doing.

St. Peter means the same when he speaks of 'human ordinance'. Now, human ordinance cannot extend to heaven and the soul, but only to the earth and the outward dealings of men with one another, matters about which men can see, know, judge, pass sentence, punish and acquit. Christ himself summarizes all this with the admirable distinction [he draws] in Matthew 22 [21]: 'Give to the Emperor the things that are the Emperor's and to God the things that are God's.' If the emperor's power extended to God's kingdom and God's power, and were not something distinct and separate, there would be no point in distinguishing the two. But, as has been said, the soul is not subject to the emperor's power. He can neither teach nor guide it; he cannot kill it or bring it to life; he cannot bind or loose it, judge it or sentence it, hold it or release it. And yet he would need to [be competent to do all of these] if he were to have the power to legislate for it and issue orders to it. But as to goods and honor, here is his proper domain. For such things are subject to his power.

David long ago summarized all this in a short, fine saying in Psalm 113 [in fact 115:16]: 'He has given heaven to the Lord of heaven, but the earth he has given to the children of men.' In other words, as regards whatever is on earth, and belongs to the temporal, earthly kingdom', man can have power from God. But whatever belongs to heaven and to the eternal kingdom, is subject to the Lord of heaven alone. And Moses was mindful of this when he says in Genesis 1[26]: 'God said: let us create men, that shall rule over the animals and the fish in the water and the birds in the air.' All this concedes no more than outward rule to men. And in sum, what is meant is, as St. Peter says in Acts 4 [in fact 5:29]: 'We must obey God rather than men.' And with this he is evidently setting a limit to secular authority. For if we were bound to do everything those with authority in the world tell us to do, there would be no point in saying 'We must obey God rather than men.'

So, if a prince or a secular lord commands you to adhere to the papacy, to believe this or that, or to surrender books, then your answer should be: it is not fitting for Lucifer to sit next to God. My good Lord, I owe you obedience with my life and goods. Command me what lies within the limits of your authority, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe, or to surrender my books, I will not obey. For then you [will have] become a tyrant and overreach[ed] yourself, commanding where you have neither right or power. If he then takes away your goods and punishes you for your disobedience, then blessed are you, and you should thank God for counting you worthy to suffer for the sake of his Word. Let the fool rage; he shall surely find his judge. But I say to you: if you do not resist him and let him take away your faith or your books, then you will truly have denied God.

Let me give you an example. In Meissen, Bavaria and the Mark, and in other places too, the tyrants have issued a decree, ordering [all] copies of the New Testament to be surrendered to their offices. What subjects [of these rulers] must do is this: they must not surrender a page, not even a letter, on pain of their soul. Whoever does so, is surrendering Christ to Herod; is a murderer of Christ, as Herod was. They should suffer their houses to be forcibly [mit Gewalt] invaded and ransacked, whether it is their books or their goods that are taken. Evil is not to be resisted, but suffered. Of course, you should not approve what is done, or lift a finger or walk a single step to aid and abet them in any way, nor should you obey. These tyrants act as worldly princes are meant to act. Worldly princes is what they are. But the world is God's enemy, and therefore they must do what is at variance with God, but congenial to the world, in order to retain their honor and remain worldly princes. And so you should not be surprised at their raging and stupidity against the Gospel. They must be true to the titles they bear.

You should know that a prudent prince has been a rare bird in the world since the beginning of time, and a just prince an even rarer one. As a rule, princes are the greatest fools or the worst criminals on earth, and the worst is always to be expected, and little good hoped for, from them, especially in what regards God and the salvation of souls. For these are God's jailers and hangmen, and his divine wrath makes use of them to punish the wicked and maintain outward peace. Our God is a mighty lord, and this is why he must have such noble, well-born, rich hangmen and beadles, and will have them receive riches, honor and fear from everyone in heaped measure. It is his divine will and pleasure that we should call his hangmen 'gracious lords', fall at their feet and be subject to them in all humility, so long as they do not overreach themselves by wanting to become pastors instead of hangmen. If a prince should happen to be prudent, just or a Christian, then that is one of the great miracles and a most precious sign of divine favor on the land. But in the ordinary run of things, what Isaiah says in 3[4] holds good: 'I will give them children for princes, and gawpers shall be their lords.' And Hosea 13[11]: 'I shall give you a king in my wrath, and out of disfavor take him away again.' The world is too wicked to deserve princes much wiser and more just than this. Frogs must have storks.

But you will again object that secular authority does not compel belief; it merely, by the use of outward means, prevents people from being led astray by false doctrine. How else could heretics be restrained? The answer is: it is for bishops to do that; that task has been assigned to them and not to rulers. The use of force can never prevent heresy. Preventing it requires a different sort of skill; this is not a battle that can be fought with the sword. This is where God's Word must fight. And if that does not win, then secular power can certainly not succeed either, even if it were to fill the world with blood. Heresy is a spiritual thing; it cannot be struck down with steel, burnt with fire or drowned in water. God's Word alone can [conquer] here; as St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10[4f]: 'Our weapons are not carnal ones, but are mighty in God, to destroy all the counsels and eminences that rise up against the knowledge of God, and they take captive all the senses in the service of Christ.'

And indeed neither faith nor heresy are ever stronger than when mere force, rather than the Word of God is used against them. For [in that case] people take it for granted that force is not being

used in the cause of right, and that those who use it are acting unjustly, precisely because they are acting without God's Word and because they cannot think of any other way of furthering their aims except by mere force, like animals that have no use of reason. Even in secular matters force cannot be used unless guilt has first been established by reference to the law. And it is all the more impossible to use force without right and God's Word in such high, spiritual matters [as heresy]. What clever princes they are! They mean to drive out heresy, but cannot attack it except with something that gives it new vigor, bringing themselves under suspicion and justifying the heretics. My friend: if you want to drive out heresy, then you must first hit on a way of uprooting it from the heart, and breaking its hold on the will. And you will not do that by using force; you will merely strengthen it. What point is there in reinforcing heresy in hearts, even if you do weaken it outwardly by shutting up people's mouths or forcing them to pretend? God's Word, on the other hand, enlightens the heart and with that all heresy and error will fall away by themselves.

It is of this way of destroying heresy that the prophet Isaiah spoke when he prophesied (Isaiah 11[4]): 'He will strike the earth with the rods of his mouth, and will kill the godless with the spirit of his lips.' You can see from this that it is words that will bring about the death and conversion of the godless. In short, such princes and tyrants do not know that fighting against heresy is fighting against the devil who takes possession of hearts by means of error. As Paul says in Ephesians 6[12]: 'Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual evil, against the princes that rule this darkness etc.' And therefore as long as the devil is not rejected and driven out of the heart, destroying his instruments by fire and sword has as much effect on him as fighting against it with a straw would have on lightning. Job dealt with all this amply when he said Job 41[18]): 'The devil looks on iron as mere straw and fears no power on earth.' And experience teaches the same. For even if all Jews and heretics are burnt, no one is vanquished or converted thereby, or ever will be.

But a world such as this one must have this sort of rulers; heaven forbid that anyone should ever do their duty! Bishops must abandon the Word of God and make no attempt to rule souls with it. Instead they must command the secular princes to rule souls by the sword. The secular princes for their part must allow usury, robbery, adultery, murder and other kinds of wickedness to go unchecked, and indeed commit such things themselves, and leave it to the bishops to punish them with letters of excommunication. And in this way everything is stood on its head: souls are ruled by steel, bodies by letters. So worldly princes rule spiritually, and spiritual princes rule in a worldly manner. What else is there for the devil to do in this world, except to play tricks on his subjects and masquerade as in a carnival. These, then, are our 'Christian princes', the 'defenders of the faith' and 'hammers of the Turks'. Able men, on whom we can rely! And they most certainly will achieve something by their admirable cleverness: they will break their necks and reduce their lands and subjects to misery and penury.

I have a piece of good advice for these misguided people. Beware of the little saying in Psalm 106 [in fact 107:40]: *Effundit contemptum super principes* [He pours out his contempt on princes]. I swear to God: if you ignore this little text, and it comes into effect against you, you are

lost, even if every one of you were as mighty as the Turk; and all your snorting and raving will not help you. To a considerable extent it has happened already. There are few princes whom people do not regard as fools or criminals, and their actions bear out [that judgment]; the common man is becoming knowledgeable and a mighty plague on princes (which God calls *contemptum*) is spreading amongst the common people and the common man. My fear is that there will be no way to stop it, unless princes begin to behave like princes and to rule reasonably and cautiously. People will not put up with your tyranny and arbitrariness any longer; they cannot and they do not want to. My good lords and masters, take heed. God [himself] will not put up with it any longer. This is no longer the world it was when you hunted and drove your people like game. So put aside your blasphemy and violence; take care that you act justly and let God's Word have free passage; it will, it must and it should, and you cannot stop it. If there is heresy, then let it be overcome by God's Word; that is how it should be. But if you go about drawing the sword on every occasion, then beware of someone coming along who will tell you to put your sword away, and not in God's name either.

But what if you were to say: how are Christians to be ruled outwardly, seeing that there ought to be no secular Sword amongst them! [Surely] there must be superiors' amongst Christians too? My answer is that there neither can, nor ought to be any superiors amongst Christians. Rather, each is equally subject to all the rest, as St. Paul says in Romans 12[10]: 'Each is to regard the next person as his superior.' And Peter (1 Pet. 5 [5]): 'Be ye all subject one to another.' And this is what Christ wants (Luke 14[10]): 'If you are invited to a wedding, take the lowest place of all.' Among Christians there is no superior except Christ alone. And how can there be superiority [or inferiority] when all are equal, and all have the same right, power, goods and honor? No one desires to be another's superior, for everyone wants to be the inferior of the rest. How could one establish superiors amongst such people, even if one wanted to? Nature will not tolerate superiors when no one wants to be, or can be, a superior. But where there are no people of [the latter] sort, there are no true Christians either.

What of priests and bishops? Their government is not one of superiority or power, but rather a service and an office'. For they are not higher or better than other Christians. And therefore they ought not to impose any laws or commands on others without their consent and permission. Their government, on the contrary, is nothing but furtherance of the Word of God, guiding Christians and overcoming heresy by means of it. As has been said, Christians can be governed by nothing except the Word of God alone. For Christians must be governed in faith, not by outward works. But faith cannot come by human words, only by God's Word. As St. Paul says in Romans 10[17]: 'Faith comes by hearing, but hearing comes through the Word of God.' Those who do not have faith are not Christians and do not belong to Christ's kingdom, but to the kingdom of the world, to be coerced and ruled by the Sword and by external government. Christians [on the other hand] do everything that is good, without any compulsion, and have all they need in God's Word. But of this I have written much and often elsewhere.

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