

Chapter 1

The Late Medieval Background



Introduction

A grasp of the European religious scene on the eve of the Reformation is absolutely indispensable to understanding the multiple crises that befell Western Christendom in the sixteenth century. For it was this scene that reformers of all types protested against. Only against this background can we grasp the full impact of the new theologies and confessions that now sprang to life. And only against this foil can we make judgments about what was innovative and what was traditional. It is not an exaggeration to say, therefore, that the more one knows about the late Middle Ages, the better one will understand the Reformation.

Yet it is a notoriously difficult matter to accurately summarize the theology, piety, and practice of so extensive a period and so vast an area. Even if we restrict ourselves to Germanic lands in the fifteenth century, we find no consensus among scholars. Where some see an exuberant flourishing of religious forms, others see only decadence and decline. What some recognize as stagnation in sub-Christian superstition, others identify as a rich and highly developed religiosity. Such judgments depend of course to some extent on the point of view of the observer, and students of this period do well to acknowledge their own prejudices. What is undeniable to all, however, and this becomes increasingly evident the more one studies the material, is that we are dealing here with enormous variety and complexity.

On the level of popular piety one finds manifestations ranging from the exalted spirituality of the mystics to the crude, and to us strange, pious practices of the illiterate peasants. Thus while some rhapsodized over the union of the soul with God, others insisted that their parish priests lead processions through the fields, reading the Gospel of John to the wheat. While some went on pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket in Canterbury to see some of the clay (left over) from which God had made Adam, others spent a lifetime meditating in all simplicity and sincerity on the Psalms. And still others paid scant attention at all to religious matters. Yet all were late medieval Christians. It may be necessary for us to generalize about piety on the eve of the Reformation, but we should understand that it is hazardous to do so.

The same confused picture appears when we turn our attention to the institutional church. Much has been written about its corruption and venality. True, Pope Alexander VI did bribe twenty-five out of twenty-six cardinals to get elected. And a good number of village priests lived in concubinage. But this should not cause us to lose sight of the utterly sincere and caring pastor who gave a lifetime of service to his people, ministering to their needs even during episodes of the plague when it would have been safer to flee. Just as the laity included both saints and sinners, so too the official representatives of this institution, from popes to parish priests, ran the entire gamut.

The Late Medieval Background



FIGURE 1.1 Map of Reformation Europe in the Sixteenth Century. Map © 2006 Lucidity Information Design, LLC. Used by permission.

As for theology, it too exhibited remarkable variety, even though it functioned largely within the parameters of official church teaching. Relatively discreet schools of thought vied for supremacy in the late medieval intellectual world, many of them anchored in the thought of one revered master. If any of these dominated, it was the nominalist school, building on the thought of William of Occam. But others presented viable, lively theological alternatives: the Thomists, the Albertists, the Augustinians, humanists, mystics, etc. Thus university theological faculties were often divided by these various loyalties and rivalries. A dynamic pluralism characterized late medieval theology, just as it characterizes Roman Catholic theology today. While some in the hierarchy saw this as a degeneration into chaos and confusion, others welcomed it as a healthy sign of a creative, energetic intellectual quest.

It was into this religious world that the first generation of Protestant reformers was born. And all of them protested against some of its features, accepted others, and modified still others. This chapter provides only a glimpse into various facets of the whole. Each document should serve as a window through which one can catch sight of an important part of this world. Together they constitute not a systematic but an impressionistic account of religion in the Christian West on the eve of the Reformation. They are a starting point for constructing a context that will allow one to understand the cataclysmic events that followed.



Spirituality

1. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (ca. 1420–1427)

Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471) joined the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine in 1406 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1413. Living at the monastery of Mount St. Agnes near Zwolle (in the Low Countries), he wrote his *Imitation of Christ* between 1420 and 1427. Written in all probability for novice monks, it soon became one of the most famous devotional books of the age, for laity and religious alike. It is a good representation, therefore, not only of clerical piety, but more importantly, of the type of piety the church was recommending to all Christians. Our excerpt forcefully illustrates the otherworldly nature of this spirituality.

On the Imitation of Christ

“He who follows me shall not walk in darkness,” says our Lord.

In these words Christ counsels us to follow His life and way if we desire true enlightenment and freedom from all blindness of heart. Let the life of Jesus Christ, then, be our first consideration.

The teaching of Jesus far transcends all the teachings of the saints, and whosoever has his spirit will discover concealed in it heavenly manna. But many people, although they often hear the gospel, feel little desire to follow it, because they lack the spirit of Christ. Whoever desires to understand and take delight in the words of Christ must strive to conform his whole life to him.

Of what use is it to discourse learnedly on the Trinity, if you lack humility and therefore displease the Trinity? Lofty words do not make

a man just or holy; but a good life makes him dear to God. I would far rather feel contrition than be able to define it. If you knew the whole Bible by heart, and all the teachings of the philosophers, how would this help you without the grace and love of God? “Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity,” except to love God and serve him alone. And this is supreme wisdom—to despise the world, and draw daily nearer the kingdom of heaven.

It is vanity to solicit honors, or to raise oneself to high station. It is vanity to be a slave to bodily desires and to crave for things which bring certain retribution. It is vanity to wish for long life, if you care little for a good life. It is vanity to give thought only to this present life, and to care nothing for the life to come. It is vanity to love things that so swiftly pass away, and not to hasten onwards to that place where everlasting joy abides. Keep constantly in mind the saying, “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” Strive to withdraw your heart from the love of visible things, and direct your affections to things invisible. For those who follow only their natural inclinations defile their conscience, and lose the grace of God.

On the Love of Solitude and Silence

Choose a suitable time for recollection and frequently consider the loving-kindness of God. Do not read to satisfy curiosity or to pass the time, but study such things as move your heart to devotion. If you avoid unnecessary talk and aimless visits, listening to news and gossip, you will find plenty of suitable time to spend in meditation on holy things. The greatest saints used to avoid the company of men whenever they were able, and chose rather to serve God in solitude.

A wise man once said, “As often as I have been among men, I have returned home a lesser

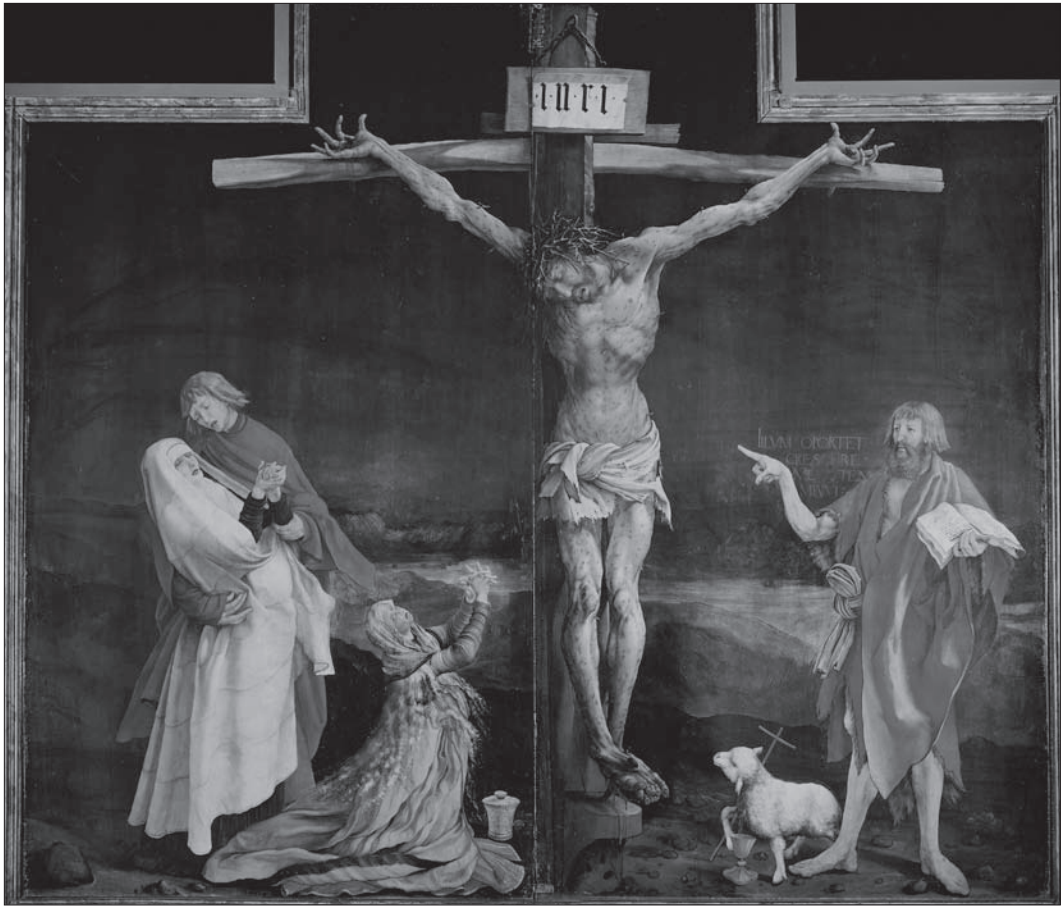


FIGURE 1.2 Grünewald, Matthias (1455-1528). *Crucifixion*. A panel from the Isenheim Altar. Limewood (around 1515). 260 x 650 cm. Musee d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France. Photo © Erich Lessing /Art Resource.

man.” We often share this experience when we spend much time in conversation. It is easier to keep silence altogether than not to talk more than we should. It is easier to remain quietly at home than to keep due watch over ourselves in public. Therefore, whoever is resolved to live an inward and spiritual life must, with Jesus, withdraw from the crowd. No man can live in the public eye without risk to his soul, unless he who would prefer to remain obscure. No man can safely speak unless he who would gladly remain silent. No man can safely command, unless he who has learned to obey well.

No man can safely rejoice, unless he possesses the testimony of a good conscience.

The security of the saints was grounded in the fear of God, nor were they less careful and humble because they were resplendent in great virtues and graces. But the security of the wicked springs from pride and presumption, and ends in self-deception. Never promise yourself security in this life, even though you seem to be a good monk or a devout hermit.

Those who stand highest in the esteem of men are most exposed to grievous peril, since they often have too great a confidence in themselves.

It is therefore, more profitable to many that they should not altogether escape temptations, but be often assailed lest they become too secure and exalted in their pride, or turn too readily to worldly consolations. How good a conscience would he keep if a man never sought after passing pleasures nor became preoccupied with worldly affairs! If only a man could cast aside all useless anxiety and think only on divine and salutary things, how great would be his peace and tranquillity!

No one is worthy of heavenly comfort, unless they have diligently exercised themselves in holy contrition. If you desire heartfelt contrition, enter into your room, and shut out the clamor of the world, as it is written, "Commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still." Within your cell you will discover what you will only too often lose abroad. The cell that is dwelt in continually becomes a delight, but ill kept it breeds weariness of spirit. If in the beginning of your religious life you have dwelt in it and kept it well, it will later become a dear friend and a welcome comfort.

In silence and quietness the devout soul makes progress and learns the hidden mysteries of the Scriptures. There she finds floods of tears in which she may nightly wash and be cleansed. For the further she withdraws from all the tumult of the world, the nearer she draws to her maker. For God with his holy angels will draw near to him who withdraws himself from his friends and acquaintances. It is better to live in obscurity and to seek the salvation of his soul, than to neglect this even to work miracles. It is commendable in a religious, therefore, to go abroad but seldom, to avoid being seen, and to have no desire to see men.

Why do you long to see that which is not lawful for you to possess? The world itself passes away, and all the desires of it. The

desires of the senses call you to roam abroad, but when their hour is spent, what do you bring back but a burdened conscience and a distracted heart? A cheerful going out often brings a sad homecoming, and a merry evening brings a sorry morning. For every bodily pleasure brings joy at first, but at length it bites and destroys.

What can you see elsewhere that you cannot see here? Look at the sky, the earth, and all the elements, for of these all things are made. What can you see anywhere under the sun that can endure for long? You hope, perhaps to find complete satisfaction; but this you will never do. Were you to see all things at present in existence spread out before your eyes, what would it be but an unprofitable vision? Lift up your eyes to God on high, and beg forgiveness for your sin and neglectfulness. Leave empty matters to the empty-headed, and give your attention to those things that God commands you. Shut your door upon you, and call upon Jesus the beloved. Remain with him in your cell, for you will not find so great a peace anywhere else. Had you never gone out and listened to idle talk, you would the better have remained perfectly at peace. But if it pleases you to hear the news of the world, you must always suffer disquiet of heart as a result.

On Contrition of Heart

If you wish to grow in holiness, you must live in the fear of God. Do not seek too much freedom, but discipline all your senses, and do not engage in foolish occupations; give yourself rather to contrition of heart, and you will find true devotion. Contrition reveals to us many good things to which dissipation rapidly blinds us. It is a wonder that any man can ever feel perfectly contented with this present life, if he weighs and considers his state of banishment, and the many perils which beset his soul.

Levity of heart and neglect of our faults make us insensible to the proper sorrows of the soul, and we often engage in empty laughter when we should rightly weep. There is no real liberty and true joy, save in the fear of God with a quiet conscience. Happy is he who can set aside every hindering distraction and recall himself to the single purpose of contrition. Happy is he who abjures whatever may stain or burden his conscience. Fight manfully, for one habit overcomes another. If you are content to let others alone, they will gladly leave you to accomplish your purpose unhindered.

Do not busy yourself with the affairs of others, nor concern yourself with the policies of your superiors. Watch yourself at all times, and correct yourself before you correct your friends. Do not be grieved if you do not enjoy popular favor; grieve rather that you do not live as well and carefully as befits a servant of God, and a devout religious person. It is often better and safer not to have many comforts in this life, especially those of the body. Yet, if we seldom or never feel God's comfort, the fault is our own; for we neither seek contrition of heart, nor entirely forego all vain and outward consolations.

Consider yourself unworthy of God's comfort, but rather deserving of much suffering. When a man is perfectly contrite, this present world becomes grievous and bitter to him. A good man always finds cause for grief and tears; for whether he considers himself or his neighbors, he knows that no man lives without trouble in this life. And the more strictly he examines himself, the more cause he finds for sorrow. Our sins and vices are grounds for rightful sorrow and contrition of heart; for they have so strong a hold on us that we are seldom able to contemplate heavenly things.

If you had more concern for a holy death than a long life, you would certainly be zealous to live better. And were you to ponder in your

mind on the pains of hell and purgatory, you would readily endure toil and sorrow, and would shrink from no kind of hardship. But because considerations of this kind do not move the heart, we remain cold and unresponsive, clinging to old delights.

It is often our lack of spiritual life that allows our wretched body to rebel so easily. Humbly beg our Lord, therefore, to grant you the spirit of contrition, and say with the prophet, "Feed me, O Lord, with the bread of tears, and give me plenteousness of tears to drink."

On Human Misery

Wherever you are and wherever you turn, you will not find happiness until you turn to God. Why are you so distressed when events do not turn out as you wish and hope? Is there anyone who enjoys everything as he wishes? Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else on earth. There is no one in the world without trouble or anxiety, be he king or pope. Whose, then, is the happiest lot? Surely, he who is able to suffer for love of God.

Many weak and foolish people say, "See what a good life that man enjoys! He is so rich, so great, so powerful, so distinguished!" But raise your eyes to the riches of heaven, and you will see that all the riches of this world are as nothing. All are uncertain and even burdensome, for they are never enjoyed without some anxiety or fear. The happiness of man does not consist in abundance of this world's goods, for a modest share is sufficient for him. The more spiritual a man desires to become, the more bitter does this present life grow for him, for he sees and realizes more clearly the defects and corruptions of human nature. For to eat and drink, to wake and sleep, to rest and labor, and to be subject to all the necessities of nature is a great trouble and affliction to the devout man,

who would rather be released and set free from all sin.

The inner life of man is greatly hindered in this life by the needs of the body. Thus, the prophet devoutly prays that he may be set free from them, saying, "Lord, deliver me from my necessities!" Woe to those who refuse to recognize their own wretchedness, and doubly woe to those who love this miserable and corruptible life! For some cling so closely to it, that although by working or begging they can hardly win the bare necessities, they would yet be willing to live here for ever if it were possible, caring nothing for the kingdom of God.

How crazy and lacking in faith are such people, who are so deeply engrossed in earthly affairs that they care for nothing but material things! These unhappy wretches will at length know to their sorrow how vile and worthless were the things that they loved. But the saints of God and all the devoted friends of Christ paid little heed to bodily pleasures, nor to prosperity in this life, for all their hopes and aims were directed towards those good things that are eternal. Their whole desire raised them upward to things eternal and invisible, so that the love of things visible could not drag them down. My brother, do not lose hope of progress in the spiritual life; you have still time and opportunity.

Why put off your good resolution? Rise and begin this very moment, and say, "Now is the time to be up and doing; now is the time to fight; now is the time to amend." When things go badly and you are in trouble, then is the time to win merit. You must pass through fire and water before you can come into the place of rest. You will never overcome your vices unless you discipline yourself severely. For so long as we wear this frail body, we cannot be without sin, nor can we live without weariness and sorrow. We would gladly be free from all troubles;

but since we have lost our innocence through sin, we have also lost true happiness. We must therefore have patience, and wait for God's mercy, until this wickedness pass away and death be swallowed up in life.

How great is the frailty of man, ever prone to evil! Today you confess your sins; tomorrow you again commit the very sins you have confessed! Now you resolve to guard against them, and within the hour you act as though you had never made any resolution! Remembering, then, our weakness and instability, it is proper to humble ourselves and never to have a high opinion of ourselves. For we can easily lose by carelessness that which by God's grace and our own efforts we had hardly won.

What will become of us in the end if our zeal so quickly grows cold? Unhappy our fate, if we rest on our oars as though we had already reached a haven of peace and security, when in fact no sign of holiness is apparent in our lives. It would be good for us to be instructed once more, like good novices, in the ways of the good life; there would then be some hope of our future improvement and greater spiritual progress.

A Meditation on Death

Very soon the end of your life will be at hand: consider, therefore, the state of your soul. Today a man is here; tomorrow he is gone. And when he is out of sight, he is soon out of mind. Oh, how dull and hard is the heart of man, which thinks only of the present, and does not provide against the future! You should order your every deed and thought as though today were the day of your death. Had you a good conscience, death would hold no terrors for you; even so, it were better to avoid sin than to escape death. If you are not ready to die today, will tomorrow find you better prepared? Tomorrow is uncertain; and how can you be sure of tomorrow?

Of what use is a long life if we amend so little? Alas, a long life often adds to our sins rather than to our virtue!

Would to God that we might spend a single day really well! Many recount the years since their conversion, but their lives show little sign of improvement. If it is dreadful to die, it is perhaps more dangerous to live long. Blessed is the man who keeps the hour of his death always in mind and daily prepares himself to die. If you have ever seen anyone die, remember that you, too, must travel the same road.

Each morning remember that you may not live until evening; and in the evening, do not presume to promise yourself another day. Be ready at all times and so live that death may never find you unprepared. Many die suddenly and unexpectedly; for at an hour that we do not know, the Son of man will come. When your last hour strikes, you will begin to think very differently of your past life and grieve deeply that you have been so careless and remiss.

Happy and wise is he who endeavors to be during his life as he wishes to be found at his death. For these things will afford us sure hope of a happy death: perfect contempt of the world; fervent desire to grow in holiness; love of discipline; the practice of penance; ready obedience; self-denial; the bearing of every trial for the love of Christ. While you enjoy health, you can do much good; but when sickness comes, little can be done. Few are made better by sickness, and those who make frequent pilgrimages seldom acquire holiness by so doing.

Do not rely on friends and neighbors, and do not delay the salvation of your soul to some future date, for men will forget you sooner than you think. It is better to make timely provision and to acquire merit in this life than to depend on the help of others. And if you have no care for your own soul, who will have care for you in time to come? The present time is most pre-

vious; now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. It is sad that you do not employ your time better, when you may win eternal life hereafter. The time will come when you will long for one day or one hour in which to amend; and who knows whether it will be granted?

Dear soul, from what peril and fear you could free yourself if you lived in holy fear, mindful of your death. Apply yourself so to live now, that at the hour of death, you may be glad and unafraid. Learn now to die to the world, that you may begin to live with Christ. Learn now to despise all earthly things, that you may go freely to Christ. Discipline your body now by penance, that you may enjoy a sure hope of salvation.

Foolish man, how can you promise yourself a long life when you are not certain of a single day? How many have deceived themselves in this way and been snatched unexpectedly from life! You have often heard how this man was slain by the sword; another drowned; how another fell from a high place and broke his neck; how another died at table; how another met his end in play. One perishes by fire, another by the sword, another from disease, another at the hands of robbers. Death is the end of all men; and the life of man passes away suddenly as a shadow.

Who will remember you when you are dead? Who will pray for you? Act now, dear soul; do all you can; for you know neither the hour of your death, nor your state after death. While you have time, gather the riches of everlasting life. Think only of your salvation, and care only for the things of God. Make friends now, by honoring the saints of God and by following their example, that when this life is over, they may welcome you to your eternal home.

Keep yourself a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, to whom the affairs of this world are of

no concern. Keep your heart free and lifted up to God, for here you have no abiding city. Daily direct your prayers and longings to heaven, that at your death your soul may merit to pass joyfully into the presence of God.

On Judgment, and the Punishment of Sinners

Always keep in mind your last end, and how you will stand before the just Judge from whom nothing is hid, who cannot be influenced by bribes and excuses, and who judges with justice. O wretched and foolish sinner, who trembles before the anger of man, how will you answer to God, who knows all your wickedness? Why do you not prepare yourself against the Day of Judgment, when no advocate can defend or excuse you, but each man will be hard put to answer for himself? While you live, your labor is profitable and your tears acceptable, for sorrow both cleanses the soul and makes peace with God.

The patient man undergoes a great and wholesome purgation; while suffering injuries, he grieves yet more for the malice of others than for his own wrongs; he gladly prays for his enemies and from his heart forgives their offenses; he does not hesitate to ask pardon of others; he is more easily moved to compassion than to anger; he rules himself with strictness and endeavors to make the body subject to the spirit in all things. It is better to expiate our sins and overcome our vices now than to reserve them for purgation hereafter; but we deceive ourselves by our inordinate love of the body.

What will the flames feed upon, but your sins? The more you spare yourself now, and indulge the desires of the body, the more severe will be your punishment hereafter, and the more fuel you gather for the flames. In whatever things a man sins, in those will he be the more severely punished. Then will the slothful be spurred by fiery goads, and the gluttonous tor-

mented by dire hunger and thirst. Then will the luxurious and pleasure-loving be plunged into burning pitch and stinking sulfur, while the envious will howl their grief like wild dogs.

There is no vice that will not receive its proper retribution. The proud will be subjected to the deepest humiliation, and the greedy experience misery and want. One hour's punishment then will be more bitter than a century of penance on earth. There will be neither rest nor comfort for the damned; but here we sometimes enjoy rest from our toil, and enjoy the comfort of our friends. Therefore, live rightly now, and grieve for your sins, that in the day of judgment you may stand secure in the company of the blessed. For then shall the righteous stand with great boldness before those who have afflicted and oppressed them. Then will he who now submits humbly to the judgment of man stand to judge others. Then will the poor and humble have great confidence, while the proud are encompassed by fears on every side.

It will then be seen that he who learned to be counted a fool and despised for Christ's sake in this world was indeed wise. Then will he be glad for every trial patiently borne, and the mouth of the wicked will be sealed. Then will every devout man be glad and the ungodly grieve. Then will he who kept his body in subjection have greater joy than he who lavished every pleasure upon it. Then will the rags of the poor shine with splendor, and the gorgeous raiment become tarnished. Then will the humble cottage of the poor be preferred to the gilded palace. Then will steadfast patience be of more avail than all worldly power. Then will humble obedience be exalted above all worldly cunning. Then will a good and clean conscience bring more joy than learned philosophy. Then will contempt for riches far outweigh all the treasures of the world. Then will devout prayer yield greater pleasure than fine fare. Then will you rejoice more in having kept silence than

in much talking. Then will holy deeds count for more than fine words. Then will a disciplined life and hard penance prove of more worth than all worldly delights.

Learn to endure a little now, that you may spare yourself more grievous troubles. Prove here what you can endure hereafter. If you can endure so little now, how could you endure the pains of hell? Be assured that a man cannot enjoy both kinds of happiness; he cannot enjoy all the pleasures of this life, and also reign with Christ in heaven. Moreover, if up to this very day you had lived in enjoyment of all honors and pleasures, how would all these profit you if you were to die at this moment? All, therefore, is vanity, save to love God and serve him alone. For he who loves God with all his heart fears neither death, punishment, judgment, nor hell; for perfect love enjoys sure access to God. But he who continues to delight in wickedness, what wonder is it if he fears death and judgment? Nevertheless, it is good that, if the love of God does not restrain you from sin, the fear of hell at least should restrain you. For he who sets aside the fear of God cannot long continue in a good life, but will rapidly fall into the snares of the devil.

Be watchful and diligent in the service of God, and frequently consider why you are come here, and why you have renounced the world. Was it not that you might live to God, and become a spiritual man? Endeavor, then, to make progress, and you will soon receive the reward of your labors; then neither fear nor sorrow will be able to trouble you. Labor for a short while now, and you will find great peace of soul, and everlasting joy. If you remain faithful in all your doings, be sure that God will be faithful and generous in rewarding you. Keep a firm hope that you will win the victor's crown; but do not be overconfident, lest you become indolent and self-satisfied.

There was once a man who was very anxious, and wavered between fear and hope. One day, overcome with sadness, he lay prostrate in prayer before the altar in church, and pondering these matters in his mind, said, "Oh, if only I knew that I should always persevere!" Then he heard within his heart an answer from God: "If you knew this, what would you do? Do now what you would then, and all will be well." So, comforted and strengthened, he committed himself to the will of God, and his anxious uncertainty vanished. Nor did he wish any longer to inquire into what would happen to him, but strove the more earnestly to learn the perfect and acceptable will of God, whenever he began or undertook any good work.

"Hope in the Lord, and do good," says the prophet: "dwell in the land, and you shall be fed with its riches." There is one thing that deters many in their spiritual progress and zeal for amendment, namely, fear of the difficulties and the cost of victory. But rest assured that those who grow in virtue beyond their fellows are they who fight most manfully to overcome whatever is most difficult and distasteful to them. For the more completely a man overcomes and cleanses himself in spirit, the more he profits and deserves abundant grace.

All men do not have the same things to overcome and mortify. But whoever is diligent and zealous—even though he has stronger passions to subdue—will certainly make greater progress than another, who is naturally self-controlled, but less zealous for holiness. Two things in particular are a great help to amendment of life—a forcible withdrawal from any vice to which our nature inclines, and a fervent pursuit of any grace of which we stand in particular need. Especially study to avoid and overcome those things that most displease you in other people.

Strive to progress in all things, and let any examples that you see or hear inspire you to

imitate them. But if you observe anything blameworthy, take care not to do the same yourself. And should you ever have done so, amend your conduct without delay. As you observe others, so do others observe you. How glad and pleasant it is to see fervent and devout brethren observing good manners and good discipline. And how sad and painful to see any who are disorderly and fail to live up to their calling. How harmful it is, if they neglect the true purpose of their vocation, and turn to matters that are not their proper concern.

Remember your avowed purpose, and keep ever before you the likeness of Christ crucified. As you meditate on the life of Jesus Christ, you should grieve that you have not tried more earnestly to conform yourself to him, although you have been a long while in the way of God. A religious who earnestly and devoutly contemplates the most holy life and passion of our Lord will find in it an abundance of all things profitable and needful to him, nor need he seek any other model than Jesus. Oh, if Jesus crucified would come into our hearts, how quickly and fully we should be instructed!

A zealous religious readily accepts and obeys all commands. But a careless and lukewarm religious has trouble after trouble, and finds sorrow on every side because he lacks true inward consolation, and is forbidden to seek it outside. Therefore a religious who disregards his Rule exposes himself to dreadful ruin. And he who desires an easier and undisciplined life will always be unstable, for one thing or another will always displease him.

Observe how many behave, who live strictly under the monastic discipline. They seldom go out, they live retired, they eat the poorest food; they work hard, they talk little, they keep long watches; they rise early, they spend much time in prayer, they study much, and always guard

themselves with discipline. Consider the Carthusians, the Cistercians, and the monks and nuns of the various orders, how they rise each night to sing praises to our Lord. Were you slothful, this should shame you, when so great a company of religious are beginning the praises of God.

Would that our sole occupation were the perpetual praise of the Lord with heart and voice! Had you no need of food, drink, or rest, you could praise God without ceasing, and give yourself wholly to spiritual things. You would be far happier than now, when you are compelled to serve the needs of the body. Would that these needs did not exist, so that we might enjoy the spiritual feasts of the soul, which, alas, we taste so seldom.

When a man no longer seeks his comfort from any creature, then he first begins to enjoy God perfectly, and he will be well content with whatever befalls him. Then he will neither rejoice over having much, nor grieve over having little, but will commit himself fully and trustfully to God, who is all in all to him: in him nothing perishes or dies, for all things live for him, and serve his will continually.

Always remember your end, and that lost time never returns. Without care and diligence, you will never acquire virtue. If you begin to grow careless, all will begin to go amiss with you. But if you give yourself to prayer, you will find great peace, and your toil will grow lighter by the help of God's grace and your love of virtue. The fervent and sincere man is prepared for anything. The war against our vices and passions is harder than any physical toil; and whoever fails to overcome his lesser faults will gradually fall into greater. Your evenings will always be tranquil if you have spent the day well. Watch yourself, bestir yourself, admonish yourself; and whatever others may do, never neglect your own soul. The

stricter you are with yourself, the greater is your spiritual progress.

From L. Sherley-Price, trans., *Thomas à Kempis: The Imitation of Christ* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), 27–28, 50–66.



The Papacy

2. Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam* (1302)

Boniface VIII, on the papal throne from 1294–1303, wrote the bull *Unam Sanctam* as a response to resistance by the king of France. It represents the high-water mark in papal claims to supreme authority, and it became for the late Middle Ages the foundation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy's self-understanding. In practice it was rudely belied by events such as the Avignon papacy (1309–1377), the Great Schism (1378–1415), the Council of Constance (1414–1418), etc. Yet the theory of papal absolutism laid down here persisted as the cornerstone of the way in which popes wished to be understood well into the modern era.

We are obliged by faith to believe and hold—and we do firmly believe and sincerely confess—that there is one holy, catholic and apostolic church, and that outside this church there is neither salvation nor remission of sins. . . . In which church there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. At the time of the flood there was one ark of Noah, symbolizing the one church; this was completed in one cubit and had one, namely Noah, as helmsman and captain; outside which all things on earth, we read, were destroyed. . . . Of this one and only church there is one body and one head—not two heads, like a monster—namely Christ, and Christ's vicar is Peter, and Peter's successor, for the Lord

said to Peter himself, “Feed my sheep.” “My sheep” he said in general, not these or those sheep; wherefore he is understood to have committed them all to him. Therefore, if the Greeks or others say that they were not committed to Peter and his successors, they necessarily confess that they are not of Christ's sheep, for the Lord says in John, “There is one fold and one shepherd.”

And we learn from the words of the gospel that in this church and in her power are two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the apostles said, “Behold here” (that is, in the church, since it was the apostles who spoke) “are two swords”—the Lord did not reply, “It is too much,” but “It is enough.” Truly he who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter, misunderstands the words of the Lord, “Put up thy sword into the sheath.” Both are in the power of the church, the spiritual sword and the material. But the latter is to be used for the church, the former by her; the former by the priest, the latter by kings and captains but at the will and by the permission of the priest. The one sword, then, should be under the other, and temporal authority subject to spiritual. For when the apostle says, “There is no power but of God, and the powers that be ordained of God,” they would not be so ordained were not one sword made subject to the other. . . .

Thus, concerning the church and her power, is the prophecy of Jeremiah fulfilled, “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms,” etc. If, therefore, the earthly power err, it shall be judged by the spiritual power; and if a lesser power err, it shall be judged by a greater. But if the supreme power err, it can be judged only by God, not by man; for the testimony of the apostle is “The spiritual man judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” For this authority, although

given to a man and exercised by a man, is not human, but rather divine, given at God's mouth to Peter and established on a rock for him and his successors in him whom he confessed, the Lord saying to Peter himself, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind," etc. Whoever therefore resists this power thus ordained of God, resists the ordinance of God. . . . Furthermore we declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff.

From G. H. Tavad, "The Bull Unam Sanctam of Boniface VIII," in P. Empie and T. Murphy, eds., *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 106–7.

3. Leo X, *Pastor Aeternus* (1516)

Two centuries later, on the very eve of Luther's protest, Pope Leo X forcefully reaffirmed the papal self-understanding inherited from Boniface VIII.

The pope alone has the power, right, and full authority, extending beyond that of all councils, to call, adjourn, and dissolve the councils. This is attested not only by the Holy Scriptures as well as the statements of the Holy Fathers and our predecessors on the throne at Rome, but even the councils themselves. . . .

It is necessary for the salvation of souls that all Christian believers be subject to the pope at Rome. The Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers testify to this, as does the bull of Pope Boniface VIII of blessed memory, which begins with the words "Unam Sanctam." Therefore, with the approval of the holy council now in session, we renew and consider this very same bull to be valid. All this is done for the salvation of believing souls, for the strengthening of the supreme authority of the pope at Rome and of the Holy See, and for the unity and

power of the church which has been entrusted to him.

From O. Thulin, *A Life of Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 27.



The Status of Women

4. Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405)

Christine de Pizan (1364–ca. 1430) was a French court poet and professional writer. Widowed at age twenty-five with a family to support, de Pizan wrote for noble patrons on commission. Her works include her autobiography, lyric poetry, a tribute to Joan of Arc, and the official biography of Charles V. She addressed contemporary issues ranging from warfare and politics to the condition and status of women. In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, the virtues of Reason, Rectitude and Justice, allegorically represented by three ladies, help her to defend women against the charge that they are intellectually and morally inferior to men.

One day as I was sitting alone in my study surrounded by books on all kinds of subjects, devoting myself to literary studies, my usual habit, my mind dwelt at length on the weighty opinions of various authors whom I had studied for a long time. I looked up from my book, having decided to leave such subtle questions in peace and to relax by reading some light poetry. With this in mind, I searched for some small book. . . . But just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many different men—and learned men among them—have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so

many wicked insults about women and their behavior. . . . They all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice. Thinking deeply about these matters, I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes, who had graciously told me of their most private and intimate thoughts, hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience whether the testimony of so many notable men could be true. To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women. Yet I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men—such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed—could have spoken falsely on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was. This reason alone, in short, made me conclude that, although my intellect did not perceive my own great faults and, likewise, those of other women because of its simpleness and ignorance, it was however truly fitting that such was the case. And so I relied more on the judgment of others than on what I myself felt and knew. I was so transfixed in this line of thinking for such a long time that it seemed as if I were in a stupor. Like a gushing fountain, a series of authorities, whom I recalled one after another, came to mind, along with their opinions on this topic. And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when He made woman, and I won-

dered how such a worthy artisan could have designed to make such an abominable work which, from what they say, is the vessel as well as the refuge and abode of every evil and vice. As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature. . . .

So occupied with these painful thoughts, my head bowed in shame, my eyes filled with tears, leaning on the pommel of my chair's armrest, I suddenly saw a ray of light fall on my lap, as though it were the sun. I shuddered then, as if wakened from sleep, for I was sitting in a shadow where the sun could not have shone at that hour. And as I lifted my head to see where this light was coming from, I saw three crowned ladies standing before me, and the splendor of their bright faces shone on me and throughout the entire room. Now no one would ask whether I was surprised, for my doors were shut and they had still entered. Fearing that some phantom had come to tempt me and filled with great fright, I made the Sign of the Cross on my forehead.

Then she who was the first of the three smiled and began to speak, "Dear daughter, do not be afraid, for we have not come here to harm or trouble you but to console you, for we have taken pity on your distress, and we have come to bring you out of the ignorance which so blinds your own intellect that you shun what you know for a certainty and believe what you do not know or see or recognize except by virtue of many strange opinions. . . . [S]weet friend, don't you see the overweening madness, the irrational blindness which prompt such observations? Is Nature, the chambermaid of God, a greater mistress than her master, almighty God from whom comes such authority, who, when He willed, took the form of man and women [*sic*] from His thought when

it came to His holy will to form Adam from the mud of the ground in the field of Damascus and, once created, brought him into the Terrestrial Paradise which was and is the most worthy place in this world here below? There Adam slept, and God formed the body of woman from one of his ribs, signifying that she should stand at his side as a companion and never lie at his feet like a slave, and also that he should love her as his own flesh. If the Supreme Craftsman was not ashamed to create and form the feminine body, would Nature then have been ashamed? It is the height of folly to say this! Indeed, how was she formed? I don't know if you have already noted this: she was created in the image of God. How can any mouth dare to slander the vessel which bears such a noble imprint? But some men are foolish enough to think, when they hear that God made man in His image, that this refers to the material body. This was not the case, for God had not yet taken a human body. The soul is meant, the intellectual spirit which lasts eternally just like the Deity. God created the soul and placed wholly similar souls, equally good and noble in the feminine and in the masculine bodies. Now, to turn to the question of the creation of the body, woman was made by the Supreme Craftsman. In what place was she created? In the Terrestrial Paradise. From what substance? Was it vile matter? No, it was the noblest substance which had ever been created: it was from the body of man from which God made woman."

"My lady, according to what I understand from you, woman is a most noble creature. But even so, Cicero says that a man should never serve any woman and that he who does so debases himself, for no man should ever serve anyone lower than him."

She replied, "The man or the woman in whom resides greater virtue is the higher; nei-

ther the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues. And surely he is happy who serves the Virgin, who is above all the angels. . . ."

After hearing these things, I replied to the lady who spoke infallibly: "My lady, truly has God revealed great wonders in the strength of these women whom you describe. But please enlighten me again, whether it has ever pleased this God, who has bestowed so many favors on women, to honor the feminine sex with the privilege of the virtue of high understanding and great learning, and whether women ever have a clever enough mind for this. I wish very much to know this because men maintain that the mind of women can learn only a little."

She answered, "My daughter, since I told you before, you know quite well that the opposite of their opinion is true, and to show you this even more clearly, I will give you proof through examples. I tell you again—and don't doubt the contrary—if it were customary to send daughters to school like sons, and if they were then taught the natural sciences, they would learn as thoroughly and understand the subtleties of all the arts and sciences as well as sons. And by chance there happen to be such women, for, as I touched on before, just as women have more delicate bodies than men, weaker and less able to perform many tasks, so do they have minds that are freer and sharper whenever they apply themselves."

"My lady, what are you saying? With all due respect, could you dwell longer on this point, please. Certainly men would never admit this answer is true, unless it is explained more plainly, for they believe that one normally sees that men know more than women do."

She answered, "Do you know why women know less?"

"Not unless you tell me, my lady."

“Without the slightest doubt, it is because they are not involved in many different things, but stay at home, where it is enough for them to run the household, and there is nothing which so instructs a reasonable creature as the exercise and experience of many different things.”

“My lady, since they have minds skilled in conceptualizing and learning, just like men, why don’t women learn more?”

She replied, “Because, my daughter, the public does not require them to get involved in the affairs which men are commissioned to execute, just as I told you before. It is enough for women to perform the usual duties to which they are ordained. . . .”

Thereupon I, Christine, once more addressed her. “My lady, you have spoken quite well but I am certain that many complaints will arise among the detractors of this present work, for they will claim that it may be true that some women have been or are good, but that all women are not good, not even the majority.”

She answered, “It is wrong to say that the majority of women are not good. This is well proven from what I have told you before about the experiences evident every day in their prayers and charitable acts and virtues and from the fact that the great horrors and evils perpetrated in the world do not come about because of them. But what a surprise that *all* women are not good! In the entire city of Nineveh, which was so large, not a single good man could be found when Jonah the prophet went there on behalf of our Lord to destroy it unless it turned away from its evil. It was even worse in the city of Sodom, as was obvious when fire from Heaven destroyed it after Lot’s departure. Moreover, note that in the company of Jesus Christ, where there were only twelve men, there was still one very bad man among them. And men dare to say that all women must be

good and that one should stone those who are not! I would simply ask them to look at themselves and then let him who is without sin cast the first stone! And what are they supposed to be? Indeed, I maintain that when men are perfect, women will follow their example.”

From Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. E. J. Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), 3, 4–6, 23–34, 63, 185–86.

5. Heinrich Kraemer, O.P., and Jacob Sprenger, O.P., *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486)

Heinrich Kraemer (d. 1505) and Jacob Sprenger (d. 1495), two Dominican inquisitors, wrote their *Hammer against Witches* in 1486, two years after Pope Innocent VIII had affirmed the reality of witchcraft and encouraged its vigorous prosecution. The book was a training manual for neophyte inquisitors intent on protecting the faithful from the bane of witchcraft. Our excerpt reveals something of the current theory of what a witch is, but more importantly it betrays a view of women which can scarcely be surpassed in its misogyny. How large a segment of the population subscribed to this view is an open question.

Concerning Witches Who Copulate with Devils

Why It Is That Women Are Chiefly Addicted to Evil Superstitions

There is also, concerning witches who copulate with devils, much difficulty in considering the methods by which such abominations are consummated. On the part of the devil: first, of what element the body is made that he assumes; secondly, whether the act is always accompanied by the injection of semen received from another; thirdly, as to time and place, whether he commits this act more frequently at one

time than at another; fourthly, whether the act is invisible to any who may be standing by. And on the part of the women, it has to be inquired whether only they who were themselves conceived in this filthy manner are often visited by devils; or secondly, whether it is those who were offered to devils by midwives at the time of their birth; and thirdly, whether the actual venereal delectation of such is of a weaker sort. But we cannot here reply to all these questions, both because we are only engaged in a general study, and because in the second part of this work they are all singly explained by their operations, as will appear in the fourth chapter, where mention is made of each separate method. Therefore let us now chiefly consider women; and first, why this kind of perfidy is found more in so fragile a sex than in men. And our inquiry will first be general, as to the general conditions of women; secondly, particular, as to which sort of women are found to be given to superstition and witchcraft; and thirdly, specifically with regard to midwives, who surpass all others in wickedness.

Why Superstition Is Chiefly Found in Women

As for the first question, why a greater number of witches is found in the fragile feminine sex than among men; it is indeed a fact that it were idle to contradict, since it is accredited by actual experience, apart from the verbal testimony of credible witnesses. And without in any way detracting from a sex in which God has always taken great glory that his might should be spread abroad, let us say that various men have assigned various reasons for this fact, which nevertheless agree in principle. Wherefore it is good, for the admonition of women, to speak of this matter; and it has often been proved by experience that they are eager to hear of it, so long as it is set forth with discretion.

For some learned men propound this reason; that there are three things in nature, the tongue, an ecclesiastic, and a woman, which know no moderation in goodness or vice; and when they exceed the bounds of their condition they reach the greatest heights and the lowest depths of goodness and vice. When they are governed by a good spirit, they are most excellent in virtue, but when they are governed by an evil spirit, they indulge the worst possible vices.

This is clear in the case of the tongue, since by its ministry most of the kingdoms have been brought into the faith of Christ; and the Holy Spirit appeared over the apostles of Christ in tongues of fire. Other learned preachers also have had as it were the tongues of dogs, licking the wounds and sores of the dying Lazarus. As it is said: *With the tongues of dogs ye save your souls from the enemy.*

For this reason St. Dominic, the leader and father of the Order of Preachers, is represented in the figure of a barking dog with a lighted torch in his mouth, that even to this day he may by his barking keep off the heretic wolves from the flock of Christ's sheep.

It is also a matter of common experience that the tongue of one prudent man can subdue the wrangling of a multitude; wherefore not unjustly Solomon sings much in their praise, in Proverbs 10: *In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found.* And again, the tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. And again, *The lips of the righteous feed many; but fools die for want of wisdom.* For this cause he adds in chapter 16, *The preparations of the heart belong to man; but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.*

But concerning an evil tongue you will find in Ecclesiasticus 28: *A backbiting tongue hath disquieted many, and driven them from nation to nation: strong cities hath it pulled down,*

and overthrown the houses of great men. And by a backbiting tongue it means a third party who rashly or spitefully interferes between two contending parties.

Secondly, concerning ecclesiastics, that is to say, clerics and religious of either sex, St. John Chrysostom speaks on the text, He cast out them that bought and sold from the temple. From the priesthood arises everything good, and everything evil. St. Jerome in his epistle to Nepotian says: Avoid as you would the plague a trading priest, who has arisen from poverty to riches, from a low to a high estate. And blessed Bernard in his Twenty-third Homily *On the Psalms* says of clerics: If one should arise as an open heretic, let him be cast out and put to silence; if he is a violent enemy, let all good men flee from him. But how are we to know which ones to cast out or to flee from? For they are confusedly friendly and hostile, peaceable and quarrelsome, neighborly and utterly selfish.

And in another place: Our bishops are become spearmen, and our pastors shearers. And by bishops here is meant those proud abbots who impose heavy labors on their inferiors, which they would not themselves touch with their little finger. And St. Gregory says concerning pastors: No one does more harm in the church than he who, having the name or order of sanctity, lives in sin; for no one dares to accuse him of sin, and therefore the sin is widely spread, since the sinner is honored for the sanctity of his order. Blessed Augustine also speaks of monks to Vincent the Donatist: I freely confess to your charity before the Lord our God, which is the witness of my soul from the time I began to serve God, what great difficulty I have experienced in the fact that it is impossible to find either worse or better men than those who grace or disgrace the monasteries.

Now the wickedness of women is spoken of in Ecclesiasticus 25: There is no head above the

head of a serpent: and there is no wrath above the wrath of a woman. I had rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than to keep house with a wicked woman. And among much which in that place precedes and follows about a wicked woman, he concludes: All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. Wherefore St. John Chrysostom says on the text, It is not good to marry (Matt. 19): What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colors! Therefore if it be a sin to divorce her when she ought to be kept, it is indeed a necessary torture; for either we commit adultery by divorcing her, or we must endure daily strife. Cicero in his second book of *The Rhetorics* says: The many lusts of men lead them into one sin, but the one lust of women leads them into all sins; for the root of all woman's vices is avarice. And Seneca says in his *Tragedies*: A woman either loves or hates; there is no third grade. And the tears of a woman are a deception, for they may spring from true grief, or they may be a snare. When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil.

But for good women there is so much praise, that we read that they have brought beatitude to men, and have saved nations, lands, and cities; as is clear in the case of Judith, Debbora, and Esther. See also 1 Corinthians 7: If a woman hath a husband that believeth not, and he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife. And Ecclesiasticus 26: Blessed is the man who has a virtuous wife, for the number of his days shall be doubled. And throughout that chapter much high praise is spoken of the excellence of good women; as also in the last chapter of Proverbs concerning a virtuous woman.

And all this is made clear also in the New Testament concerning women and virgins and other holy women who have by faith led nations and kingdoms away from the worship of idols to the Christian religion. Anyone who looks at Vincent of Beauvais will find marvelous things of the conversion of Hungary by the most Christian Gilia, and of the Franks by Clotilda, the wife of Clovis. Wherefore in many vituperations that we read against women, the word *woman* is used to mean the lust of the flesh. As it is said: I have found a woman more bitter than death, and a good woman subject to carnal lust.

Others again have propounded other reasons why there are more superstitious women found than men. And the first is, that they are more credulous; and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them. See Ecclesiasticus 19: He that is quick to believe is light-minded, and shall be diminished. The second reason is, that women are naturally more impressionable, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit; and that when they use this quality well they are very good, but when they use it ill they are very evil.

The third reason is that they have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know; and, since they are weak, they find an easy and secret manner of vindicating themselves by witchcraft. See Ecclesiasticus as quoted above: I had rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than to keep house with a wicked woman. All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. And to this may be added that, as they are very impressionable, they act accordingly.

There are also others who bring forward yet other reasons, of which preachers should be very careful how they make use. For it is true

that in the Old Testament the Scriptures have much that is evil to say about women, and this because of the first temptress, Eve, and her imitators; yet afterwards in the New Testament we find a change of name, as from Eva to Ave (as St. Jerome says), and the whole sin of Eve taken away by the benediction of Mary. Therefore preachers should always say as much praise of them as possible.

But because in these times this perfidy is more often found in women than in men, as we learn by actual experience, if anyone is curious as to the reason, we may add to what has already been said the following: that since they are feebler both in mind and body, it is not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft.

For as regards intellect, or the understanding of spiritual things, they seem to be of a different nature from men; a fact which is vouched for by the logic of the authorities, backed by various examples from the Scriptures. Terence says: Women are intellectually like children. And Lactantius: No woman understood philosophy except Temeste. And Proverbs 11, as it were describing a woman, says: As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.

But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives. For Cato says: when a woman weeps she weaves snares. And again: when a woman weeps, she labors to deceive a man. And this is shown by Samson's wife, who coaxed him to tell her the riddle he had propounded to the Philistines, and told

them the answer, and so deceived him. And it is clear in the case of the first woman that she had little faith; for when the serpent asked why they did not eat of every tree in Paradise, she answered: Of every tree, etc.—lest perchance we die. Thereby she showed that she doubted, and had little faith in the Word of God. And all this is indicated by the etymology of the word; for *Femina* comes from *Fe* and *Minus*, since she is ever weaker to hold and preserve the faith. And this as regards faith is of her very nature; although both by grace and nature faith never failed in the Blessed Virgin, even at the time of Christ's passion, when it failed in all men.

Therefore a wicked woman is by her nature quicker to waver in her faith, and consequently quicker to abjure the faith, which is the root of witchcraft.

And as to her other mental quality, that is, her natural will; when she hates someone whom she formerly loved, then she seethes with anger and impatience in her whole soul, just as the tides of the sea are always heaving and boiling. Many authorities allude to this cause. Ecclesiasticus 25: There is no wrath above the wrath of a woman. And Seneca: No might of the flames or of the swollen winds, no deadly weapon, is so much to be feared as the lust and hatred of a woman who has been divorced from the marriage bed.

This is shown too in the woman who falsely accused Joseph, and caused him to be imprisoned because he would not consent to the crime of adultery with her (Gen. 30). And truly the most powerful cause which contributes to the increase of witches is the woeful rivalry between married folk and unmarried women and men. This is so even among holy women, so what must it be among the others? For you see in Genesis 21 how impatient and envious Sarah was of Hagar when she conceived; how jealous

Rachel was of Leah because she had no children (Gen. 30); and Hannah, who was barren, of the fruitful Peninnah (1 Kings 1); and how Miriam (Num. 12) murmured and spoke ill of Moses, and was therefore stricken with leprosy; and how Martha was jealous of Mary Magdalene, because she was busy and Mary was sitting down (Luke 10). To this point is Ecclesiasticus 37: Neither consult with a woman touching her of whom she is jealous. Meaning that it is useless to consult with her, since there is always jealousy, that is, envy, in a wicked woman. And if women behave thus to each other, how much more will they do so to men.

Valerius Maximus tells us how, when Phoro-neus, the king of the Greeks, was dying, he said to his brother Leontius that there would have been nothing lacking to him of complete happiness if a wife had always been lacking to him. And when Leontius asked how a wife could stand in the way of happiness, he answered that all married men well knew. And when the philosopher Socrates was asked if one should marry a wife, he answered: If you do not, you are lonely, your family dies out, and a stranger inherits; if you do, you suffer perpetual anxiety, querulous complaints, reproaches concerning the marriage portion, the heavy displeasure of your relations, the garrulousness of a mother-in-law, cuckoldom, and no certain arrival of an heir. This he said as one who knew. For St. Jerome in his *Contra Iovinianum* says: This Socrates had two wives, whom he endured with much patience, but could not be rid of their contumelies and clamorous vituperations. So one day when they were complaining against him, he went out of the house to escape their plaguing, and sat down before the house; and the women then threw filthy water over him. But the philosopher was not disturbed by this, saying, "I knew that the rain would come after the thunder."

There is also a story of a man whose wife was drowned in a river, who, when he was searching for the body to take it out of the water, walked up the stream. And when he was asked why, since heavy bodies do not rise but fall, he was searching against the current of the river, he answered: "When that woman was alive she always, both in word and in deed, went contrary to my commands; therefore I am searching in the contrary direction in case even now she is dead she may preserve her contrary disposition."

And indeed, just as through the first defect in their intelligence they are more prone to abjure the faith; so through their second defect of inordinate affections and passions they search for, brood over, and inflict various vengeance, either by witchcraft, or by some other means. Wherefore it is no wonder that so great a number of witches exist in this sex.

Women also have weak memories; and it is a natural vice in them not to be disciplined, but to follow their own impulses without any sense of what is due; this is her whole study, and all that she keeps in her memory. So Theophrastus says: If you hand over the whole management of the house to her, but reserve some minute detail to your own judgment, she will think that you are displaying a great want of faith in her, and will stir up strife; and unless you quickly take counsel, she will prepare poison for you, and consult seers and soothsayers; and will become a witch.

But as to domination by women, hear what Cicero says in the *Paradoxes*. Can he be called a free man whose wife governs him, imposes laws on him, orders him, and forbids him to do what he wishes, so that he cannot and dare not deny her anything that she asks? I should call him not only a slave, but the vilest of slaves, even if he comes of the noblest family. And Seneca, in the character of the raging Medea, says: Why

do you cease to follow your happy impulse; how great is that part of vengeance in which you rejoice? Where he adduces many proofs that a woman will not be governed, but will follow her own impulse even to her destruction. In the same way we read of many women who have killed themselves either for love or sorrow because they were unable to work their vengeance.

St. Jerome, writing of Daniel, tells a story of Laodice, wife of Antiochus king of Syria; how, being jealous lest he should love his other wife, Berenice, more than her, she first caused Berenice and her daughter by Antiochus to be slain, and then poisoned herself. And why? Because she would not be governed, but would follow her own impulse. Therefore St. John Chrysostom says not without reason: O evil worse than all evil, a wicked woman, whether she be poor or rich. For if she be the wife of a rich man, she does not cease night and day to excite her husband with hot words, to use evil blandishments and violent importunations. And if she have a poor husband she does not cease to stir him also to anger and strife. And if she be a widow, she takes it upon herself everywhere to look down on everybody, and is inflamed to all boldness by the spirit of pride.

If we inquire, we find that nearly all the kingdoms of the world have been overthrown by women. Troy, which was a prosperous kingdom, was, for the rape of one woman, Helen, destroyed, and many thousands of Greeks slain. The kingdom of the Jews suffered much misfortune and destruction through the accursed Jezebel, and her daughter Athaliah, queen of Judah, who caused her son's sons to be killed, that on their death she might reign herself; yet each of them was slain. The kingdom of the Romans endured much evil through Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, that worst of women. And so with others. Therefore it is no

wonder if the world now suffers through the malice of women.

And now let us examine the carnal desires of the body itself, whence has arisen unconscionable harm to human life. Justly may we say with Cato of Utica: If the world could be rid of women, we should not be without God in our intercourse. For truly, without the wickedness of women, to say nothing of witchcraft, the world would still remain proof against innumerable dangers. Hear what Valerius said to Rufinus: You do not know that woman is the Chimera, but it is good that you should know it; for that monster was of three forms; its face was that of a radiant and noble lion, it had the filthy belly of a goat, and it was armed with the virulent tail of a viper. And he means that a woman is beautiful to look upon, contaminating to the touch, and deadly to keep.

Let us consider another property of hers, the voice. For as she is a lair by nature, so in her speech she stings while she delights us. Wherefore her voice is like the song of the Sirens, who with their sweet melody entice the passersby and kill them. For they kill them by emptying their purses, consuming their strength, and causing them to forsake God. Again Valerius says to Rufinus: When she speaks it is a delight which flavors the sin; the flower of love is a rose, because under its blossom there are hidden many thorns. See Proverbs 5:3-4: Her mouth is smoother than oil; that is, her speech is afterwards as bitter as absinthe.

Let us consider also her gait, posture, and habit, in which is vanity of vanities. There is no man in the world who studies so hard to please God as even an ordinary woman studies by her vanities to please men. An example of this is to be found in the life of Pelagia, a worldly woman who was wont to go about Antioch tired and adorned most extravagantly. A holy father, named Nonnus, saw her and began to weep, saying to

his companions, that never in all his life had he used such diligence to please God; and much more he added to this effect, which is preserved in his orations.

It is this which is lamented in Ecclesiastes 7, and which the Church even now laments on account of the great multitude of witches. And I have found a woman more bitter than death, who is the hunter's snare, and her heart is a net, and her hands are bands. He that pleaseth God shall escape from her; but he that is a sinner shall be caught by her. More bitter than death, that is, than the devil: Revelation 6:8, His name was Death. For though the devil tempted Eve to sin, yet Eve seduced Adam. And as the sin of Eve would not have brought death to our soul and body unless the sin had afterwards passed on to Adam, to which he was tempted by Eve, not by the devil, therefore she is more bitter than death.

More bitter than death, again, because that is natural and destroys only the body; but the sin which arose from woman destroys the soul by depriving it of grace, and delivers the body up to the punishment for sin.

More bitter than death, again, because bodily death is an open and terrible enemy, but woman is a wheedling and secret enemy.

And that she is more perilous than a snare does not speak of the snare of hunters, but of devils. For men are caught not only through their carnal desires, when they see and hear women: for St. Bernard says: Their face is a burning wind, and their voice the hissing of serpents: but they also cast wicked spells on countless men and animals. And when it is said that her heart is a net, it speaks of the inscrutable malice which reigns in their hearts. And her hands are as bands for binding; for when they place their hands on a creature to bewitch it, then with the help of the devil they perform their design.

To conclude. All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable. See Proverbs 30. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, a fourth thing which says not, It is enough; that is, the mouth of the womb. Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils. More such reasons could be brought forward, but to the understanding it is sufficiently clear that it is no matter for wonder that there are more women than men found infected with the heresy of witchcraft. And in consequence of this, it is better called the heresy of witches than of wizards, since the name is taken from the more powerful party. And blessed be the highest who has so far preserved the male sex from so great a crime: for since he was willing to be born and to suffer for us, therefore he has granted to men this privilege.

What Sort of Women Are Found to Be above All Others Superstitious and Witches

As to our second inquiry, what sort of women more than others are found to be superstitious and infected with witchcraft; it must be said, as was shown in the preceding inquiry, that three general vices appear to have special dominion over wicked women, namely infidelity, ambition, and lust. Therefore they are more than others inclined towards witchcraft, who more than others are given to these vices. Again, since of these three vices the last chiefly predominates, women being insatiable, etc., it follows that those among ambitious women are more deeply infected who are more hot to satisfy their filthy lusts; and such are adulteresses, fornicatresses, and the concubines of the great.

Now there are, as it is said in the papal bull, seven methods by which they infect with witchcraft the venereal act and the conception of the womb: First, by inclining the minds of men to

inordinate passion; second, by obstructing their generative force; third, by removing the members accommodated to that act; fourth, by changing men into beasts by their magic art; fifth, by destroying the generative force in women; sixth, by procuring abortion; seventh, by offering children to devils, besides other animals and fruits of the earth with which they work much harm. And all these will be considered later; but for the present let us give our minds to the injuries towards men.

And first concerning those who are bewitched into an inordinate love or hatred, this is a matter of a sort that it is difficult to discuss before the general intelligence. Yet it must be granted that it is a fact. For St. Thomas, treating of obstructions caused by witches, shows that God allows the devil greater power against men's venereal acts than against their other actions; and gives this reason, that this is likely to be so, since those women are chiefly apt to be witches who are most disposed to such acts.

For he says that, since the first corruption of sin by which man became the slave of the devil came to us through the act of generation, therefore greater power is allowed by God to the devil in this act than in all others. Also the power of witches is more apparent in serpents, as it is said, than in other animals, because through the means of a serpent the devil tempted woman. For this reason also, as is shown afterwards, although matrimony is a work of God, as being instituted by him, yet it is sometimes wrecked by the work of the devil: not indeed through main force, since then he might be thought stronger than God, but with the permission of God, by causing some temporary or permanent impediment in the conjugal act.

And touching this we may say what is known by experience; that these women satisfy their filthy lusts not only in themselves, but even in

the mighty ones of the age, of whatever state and condition; causing by all sorts of witchcraft the death of their souls through the excessive infatuation of carnal love, in such a way that for no shame or persuasion can they desist from such acts. And through such men, since the witches will not permit any harm to come to them either from themselves or from others once they have them in their power, there arises the great danger of the time, namely, the extermination of the faith. And in this way do witches every day increase.

And would that this were not true according to experience. But indeed such hatred is aroused by witchcraft between those joined in the sacrament of matrimony, and such freezing up of the generative forces, that men are unable to perform the necessary action for begetting offspring. But since love and hate exist in the soul, which even the devil cannot enter, lest these things should seem incredible to anyone, they must be inquired into; and by meeting argument with argument the matter will be made clear.

From M. Summers, trans., *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kraemer and Jacob Sprenger* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 41–48.

6. Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (1509)

At an opposite extreme to Kraemer and Sprenger in late medieval views of women, we find Henricus Agrippa's *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (1509). Given Agrippa's maverick tendency to try to prove the opposite of popular opinion, historians are not sure how seriously to take his argument. Was this work designed to amuse rather than persuade? Nevertheless, here we have an individual of considerable humanist learning trying to

turn more conventional wisdom on the status of women on its head.

Cease, inane babbler, to praise the male sex more than is just, lest you build a worthless heap of encomia.

Cease, if you are wise, to condemn the female sex with malicious words that lack reason.

If you weigh each sex carefully in your balance, whoever is male will yield to the female sex.

But if you hesitate to believe this, and the issue seems still unsettled to you,

I have here a witness who has not appeared elsewhere,

a short work which studious Agrippa has recently compiled,

Praising the female sex as superior to the male.

Equality of Soul in Men and Women

God most beneficent, Father and creator of all good things, who alone possesses the fecundity of the two sexes, created humans in his image, male and female created he them. Sexual distinction consists only in the different location of the parts of the body for which procreation required diversity. But he has attributed to both man and woman an identical soul, which sexual difference does not at all affect. Woman has been allotted the same intelligence, reason, and power of speech as man and tends to the same end he does, that is, [eternal] happiness, where there will be no restriction by sex. For according to the truth of the gospel, although all will return to life in their own sex, they will no longer carry out the functions of their sex, but it has been promised to them that they will be similar to angels. Thus, there is no preeminence of nobility of one sex over the other by reason of the nature of the soul; rather, inwardly free, each is equal in dignity.

But, setting aside the divine essence of the soul in humans, in everything else that constitutes human being the illustrious feminine stock is almost infinitely superior to the ill-bred masculine race. This will appear indisputable when I have demonstrated it (and this is my purpose), not by forged or counterfeit speech or by the snares of logic in which many sophists love to entrap us, but by taking for authorities the best authors and by appealing to authentic historical accounts, clear explanations, the evidence of Holy Scripture, and prescriptions drawn from the two laws.

The Superior Beauty of Women

Since beauty itself is nothing other than the refulgence of the divine countenance and light which is found in things and shines through a beautiful body, women—who reflect the divine—were much more lavishly endowed and furnished with beauty than man. Whence follows the wonderful softness of the female body to sight and touch, her tender flesh, her fair and clear complexion, her shiny skin, the beauty of her head decked with long silky hair shining and supple, the great majesty of her face with its cheerful demeanor, her face the most fair of all creatures, her neck of a milky whiteness, her forehead large, high, noble. She has penetrating and sparkling eyes, which unite with grace and an amiable gaiety; the slender arch of her eyebrows rises above them, between them a beautiful open space, descending from which is a nose straight and properly proportioned. Under her nose is a red mouth, which owes its beauty to the symmetrical disposition of her tender lips; when she smiles we see her dainty teeth, well placed, as white as ivory, less numerous however than those of men, for woman is neither a glutton nor as aggressive as man. The cheeks and jaws impart to her a tender softness, a tinted rosy glow and modest demeanor; she

has a delightful chin, round and with a charming dimple. Under this she has a slender neck, long enough, elevated above round shoulders. Her throat is delicate and white, of medium size. Her voice and her words are agreeable; her chest, large and prominent, makes for a harmonious unity of flesh and of breasts, with the same plumpness on each side both in the firmness of the breasts and in the roundness of both them and the belly. Her sides are supple, her back rises straight up; she has long arms, her hands are well made, her fingers slender with fine joints, her hips and thighs full, her calves plump, the ends of her hands and feet rounded off; all her members are full of vitality. In addition, she has a modest bearing, propriety in her movement, dignified gestures, and is, besides, in her whole body of a universally attractive proportion and symmetry, figure, and carriage.

There is no other creature who offers a sight so admirable, a similar marvel to behold, to the point that one would have to be blind not to see that God himself has put together in woman all that is beautiful in the whole world. All are dazzled by her beauty and love and venerate her on many accounts, to such an extent that we regularly see incorporeal spirits and demons perish with passionate love for women (and this is not an erroneous belief but a truth confirmed by many experiences).

The Superior Role of Women in Salvation

So then the blessing has been given because of woman, but the law because of man, and this was a law of wrath and curse; for it was to the man that the fruit of the tree had been prohibited, and not to the woman who had not yet been created. God wished her to be free from the beginning; it was therefore the man who committed the sin in eating, not the woman, the man who brought death, not the woman.

And all of us have sinned in Adam, not in Eve, and we are infected with original sin not from our mother, who is a woman, but from our father, a man. Moreover, the ancient law ordained the circumcision of all males but left women uncircumcised, deciding without doubt to punish original sin in the sex that had sinned. And besides, God did not punish the woman for having eaten, but for having given to the man the occasion of evil, which she did through ignorance, tempted as she was by the devil. The man sinned in all knowledge, the woman fell into error through ignorance and because she was deceived. For she was also the first whom the devil tempted, knowing that she was the most excellent of creatures, and, as Bernard says: "The devil, seeing her admirable beauty and knowing that this beauty was the same that he had known in the divine light when he possessed it, that he enjoyed beyond all the other angels in conversation with God, directed his envy against the woman alone, by reason of her excellence."

Christ, born into our world in the greatest humility, took the more humble male sex and not the more elevated and noble female sex, in order to expiate by this humility the arrogant sin of the first father. In addition, because we have been condemned on account of the sin of the man and not of the woman, God wished that this sin be expiated by the sex that had sinned and that atonement come through the same sex that had been deceived in ignorance. This is why God said to the serpent that the woman, or rather, according to a better reading, the seed of the woman, would crush his head, and not the man or the seed of the man. Perhaps also this explains why the priesthood was conferred by the church on man rather than on woman, because every priest represents Christ, and Christ represents the first person

who sinned, that is, Adam himself. One can thus understand the canon that begins with the words "this image" to assert that the woman has not been made in the image of God, that is to say, in corporeal resemblance to Christ.

Moreover, God—I speak of Christ—has not chosen to be the son of a man, but of a woman, whom he has honored to the point that he became incarnate from a woman alone. For Christ is called son of man because of a woman, not because of a husband. This is an extraordinary miracle, which causes the prophet to be astounded, that a woman has encircled a man as a protection, since the male sex has been engulfed by a virgin who carried Christ in her body.

Moreover, when Christ rose from the dead, he appeared first to women, not to men. And it is well known that after the death of Christ some men abjured their faith, although no text attests that women abandoned the faith and the Christian religion. Still further, no persecution, no heresy, no aberration in faith ever occurred because of the deeds of women; one knows that it was otherwise with men. Christ was betrayed, sold, bought, accused, condemned, suffered the passion, was put on a cross, and finally delivered to death only by men. Even more, he was denied by Peter who loved him and abandoned by all the other disciples; only some women accompanied him to the cross and the tomb. Even a pagan, the wife of Pilate, made greater efforts to save Jesus than any of the men who had believed in him. Add to this the fact that theologians almost unanimously agree that the church at that time dwelled only in a single woman, the Virgin Mary, which makes it fitting to call the female sex religious and holy.

If one says with Aristotle that, among all living beings, the males are more courageous,

wise, and noble, the apostle Paul, who was a more excellent teacher than he, responds in these words: "God has chosen foolish things of the world to confound the wise, God has chosen the weak of the world to confound the strong; and God has chosen vile things and those that are despised, things which are not, in order to reduce to nothing things which are."

Concluding Summary

Now, to sum up as briefly as possible, I have shown the preeminence of the female sex according to her name, order, place, and material of her creation, and the status superior to man she has received from God. Moreover, I have demonstrated this with respect to religion, nature, and human laws, and [in each case] through diverse authorities, reasons, and examples. However, as numerous as have been my arguments, I have left still more numerous points untreated, because neither personal ambition nor the desire to make the most of myself but duty and truth moved me to write. I did not want to appear, if I kept silent, to steal from so devoted a sex—by an impious silence—the praises owed to it (as it were burying the talent entrusted to me). But if anyone more diligent than I finds some argument I have overlooked that he thinks should be added to this work of mine, I shall believe that I have not been discredited but rather supported by him in the measure to which he will make better this good work of mine through his talent and his learning.

And now, lest this work turn into a huge book, let this be the end of it.

From Albert Rabil, Jr., ed. and trans., *Henricus Cornelius Agrippa: Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43–44, 50–51, 62–65, 96–97.

7. Desiderius Erasmus, *The Abbot and the Learned Lady* (1524)

The great humanist Erasmus (d. 1536) was one of the most educated and influential voices of the Reformation period. In this excerpt from his *Colloquies*, he describes a conversation between Antronius (the abbot) and Magdalia (the learned lady). His criticism of the ignorance and immorality of the cleric is heightened by contrasting it with the learning and virtue of the woman. This satire offers a humorous and yet vigorous defense of the value of educating women.

Antronius: What furnishings do I see here?

Magdalia: Elegant, aren't they?

Antronius: How elegant I don't know, but certainly unbecoming both to a young miss and a married woman.

Magdalia: Why?

Antronius: Because the whole place is full of books.

Magdalia: Are you so old, an abbot as well as a courtier, and have never seen books in court ladies' houses?

Antronius: Yes, but those were in French. Here I see Greek and Latin ones.

Magdalia: Are French books the only ones that teach wisdom?

Antronius: But it's fitting for court ladies to have something with which to beguile their leisure.

Magdalia: Are court ladies the only ones allowed to improve their minds and enjoy themselves?

Antronius: You confuse growing wise with enjoying yourself. It's not feminine to be brainy. A lady's business is to have a good time.

Magdalia: Shouldn't everyone live well?

Antronius: Yes, in my opinion.

Magdalia: But who can have a good time without living well?



FIGURE 1.3 Erasmus of Rotterdam, medallion portrait, 1536. Photo courtesy of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Antronus: Rather, who can enjoy himself if he *does* live well?

Magdalia: So you approve of those who live basely if only they have a good time?

Antronus: I believe those who have a good time are living well.

Magdalia: Where does this good time come from? From externals or from within?

Antronus: From externals.

Magdalia: Shrewd abbot but stupid philosopher! Tell me: how do you measure good times?

Antronus: By sleep, dinner parties, doing as one likes, money, honours.

Magdalia: But if to these things God added wisdom, you wouldn't enjoy yourself?

Antronus: What do you mean by wisdom?

Magdalia: This: understanding that a man is not happy without the goods of the mind; that wealth, honours, noble birth make him neither happier nor better.

Antronus: Away with that wisdom!

Magdalia: What if I enjoy reading a good author more than you do hunting, drink-

ing, or playing dice? You won't think I'm having a good time?

Antronus: I wouldn't live like that.

Magdalia: I'm not asking what *you* would enjoy most, but what *ought* to be enjoyable.

Antronus: I wouldn't want my monks to spend their time on books.

Magdalia: Yet my husband heartily approves of my doing so. But exactly why do you disapprove of this in your monks?

Antronus: Because I find they're less tractable; they talk back by quoting from decrees and decretals, from Peter and Paul.

Magdalia: So your rules conflict with those of Peter and Paul?

Antronus: What *they* may enjoy I don't know, but still I don't like a monk who talks back. And I don't want any of mine to know more than I do.

Magdalia: You could avoid that by endeavouring to know as much as possible.

Antronus: I haven't the leisure.

Magdalia: How come?

Antronus: Because I've no free time.

Magdalia: No free time to grow wise?

Antronus: No.

Magdalia: What hinders you?

Antronus: Long prayers, housekeeping, hunts, horses, court functions.

Magdalia: So these are more important to you than wisdom?

Antronus: It's what we're used to.

Magdalia: Now tell me this: if some heavenly power enabled you to turn your monks and yourself too into any animal whatever, would you change them into hogs and yourself into a horse?

Antronus: Not at all.

Magdalia: But by doing so you'd prevent anybody's being wiser than you.

Antronius: I shouldn't much care what sort of animal the monks were, provided I myself were a human being.

Magdalia: Do you think one is human if he's neither wise nor wants to be wise?

Antronius: I'm wise enough—so far as I'm concerned.

Magdalia: And swine are wise enough so far as *they're* concerned.

Antronius: You strike me as a sophistress, so keenly do you dispute.

Magdalia: I won't say how you strike me. But why do these furnishings displease you?

Antronius: Because distaff and spindle are the proper equipment for women.

Magdalia: Isn't it a wife's business to manage the household and rear the children?

Antronius: It is.

Magdalia: Do you think she can manage so big a job without wisdom?

Antronius: I suppose not.

Magdalia: But books teach me this wisdom.

Antronius: Sixty-two monks I have in the monastery, yet you won't find a single book in my cell.

Magdalia: Those monks are well provided for!

Antronius: I could put up with books, but not Latin ones.

Magdalia: Why not?

Antronius: Because that language isn't fit for women.

Magdalia: I want to know why.

Antronius: Because it does little to protect their chastity.

Magdalia: Therefore French books, full of the most frivolous stories, do promote chastity?

Antronius: There's another reason.

Magdalia: Tell me plainly, whatever it is.

Antronius: They're safer from priests if they don't know Latin.

Magdalia: Very little danger from you in that respect, since you take such pains not to know Latin!

Antronius: The public agrees with me, because it's a rare and exceptional thing for a woman to know Latin.

Magdalia: Why cite the public, the worst possible authority on conduct? Why tell me of custom, the mistress of every vice? Accustom yourself to the best; then the unusual will become habitual, the unpleasant enjoyable, the apparently unseemly, seemly.

Antronius: I hear you.

Magdalia: Is it fitting for a German woman to learn French?

Antronius: Of course.

Magdalia: Why?

Antronius: To talk with those who know French.

Magdalia: And you think it unsuitable for me to know Latin in order to converse daily with authors so numerous, so eloquent, so learned, so wise, with counselors so faithful?

Antronius: Books ruin women's wits—which are none too plentiful anyway.

Magdalia: How plentiful yours are, I don't know. Assuredly I prefer to spend mine, however slight, on profitable studies rather than on prayers said by rote, all-night parties, and heavy drinking.

Antronius: Bookishness drives people mad.

Magdalia: The company of boozers, fools, and jesters doesn't drive you mad?

Antronius: Not at all. It relieves boredom.

Magdalia: Then how could such delightful companions as mine drive me mad?

Antronius: That's what people say.

Magdalia: But the plain fact of the matter says something else. How many more we see driven mad through intemperate wining and dining, night-long bouts of drunkenness, uncontrolled passions!

Antronus: I'm sure I wouldn't want a learned wife.

Magdalia: But I congratulate myself on having a husband different from you. For learning endears him more to me and me to him.

Antronus: Learning costs immense toil, and after all you must die.

Magdalia: Tell me, my dear sir: if you had to die tomorrow, would you rather die more foolish or more wise?

Antronus: If wisdom came without hard work—

Magdalia: But man gets nothing in this life without hard work. And yet whatever he does win, with however much labour, must be left behind. Why should we hesitate to take pains in the most precious thing of all, the fruits of which accompany us to another life also?

Antronus: I've often heard the common saying, "A wise woman is twice foolish."

Magdalia: That's commonly said, yes, but by fools. A woman truly wise is not wise in her own conceit. On the other hand, one who thinks herself wise when she knows nothing is indeed twice foolish.

Antronus: I don't know how it is, but as pack-saddles don't fit an ox, so learning doesn't fit a woman.

Magdalia: But you can't deny that pack-saddles would fit an ox better than a mitre would fit an ass or a swine. What's your feeling about the Virgin Mother?

Antronus: I reverence her.

Magdalia: Didn't she read books?

Antronus: Yes, but not these.

Magdalia: What did she read, then?

Antronus: The canonical Hours.

Magdalia: According to which use?

Antronus: The Benedictine.

Magdalia: Very likely! What about Paula and Eustochium? Didn't they read the Sacred Scriptures?

Antronus: But that's rare nowadays.

Magdalia: So was an unlettered abbot a rare bird once upon a time! Nowadays nothing's more common. Once upon a time princes and emperors excelled as much in learning as in might. But even now this isn't so rare as you suppose. In Spain and Italy there are not a few women of the highest rank who can rival any man. In England there are the More daughters, in Germany the Pirckheimer and Blarer ladies. If you're not careful, the net result will be that we'll preside in the theological schools, preach in the churches, and wear your mitres.

Antronus: God forbid!

Magdalia: No, it will be up to *you* to forbid. But if you keep on as you've begun, geese may do the preaching sooner than put up with you tongue-tied pastors. The world's a stage that's topsy-turvy now, as you see. Everyone must play his part or—exit.

Antronus: How did I run across this woman? When you come calling on us, I'll treat you more politely.

Magdalia: How?

Antronus: We'll dance, drink as much as we please, hunt, play games, laugh.

Magdalia: For my part, I feel like laughing even now.

From C. Thompson, ed. and trans., *Desiderius Erasmus: Colloquies in Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 39 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 501–5.



Exegesis

8. Jacobus Faber Stapulensis, Introduction to the *Commentary on the Psalms* (1508)

As in every age, so too in the late Middle Ages, biblical exegesis was Christian theology's foundational discipline. The numerous biblical commentaries of the period contradict the later Protestant claim that pre-Reformation Catholicism ignored the Bible. The most advanced exegetical work of the period was done by humanists, among them Jacobus Faber Stapulensis (or Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, d. 1536). The introduction to his *Commentary on the Psalms* from 1508 illustrates his love of the Scriptures; his grappling with the traditional fourfold "senses" of the text (literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical); his sophistication in recognizing the complexity of the "literal" sense; and his altogether conventional anti-Jewish bias.

Whereas almost all studies are apt to yield nothing but pleasure and gain, only study of divine matters serves not merely pleasure and gain but promises the highest felicity. "Blessed are those," the psalmist said, "who study your testimonies." What is better for us to pursue? To what should we dedicate ourselves more completely? Indeed for a long time I pursued human concerns and paid only "lip service," as the expression goes, to theological studies (which are exalted and ought not to be approached casually). But even after a haphazard sampling of divine things I saw so much light shine forth that, by comparison, the human disciplines seemed like darkness. They breathed a fragrance of such sweetness that nothing like it can be found on earth, nor could I believe that there is any other earthly

paradise whose odor could lead souls toward immortality.

I have frequently visited monasteries, but I have become convinced that those who do not love this sweetness certainly have not the slightest notion of the true food of the soul. For our spirits live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," and what are these words but Holy Scripture itself? Those who do not love this sweetness are dead in spirit. And from the moment that these pious studies are no longer pursued, monasteries decay, devotion dies out, the flame of religion is extinguished, spiritual things are traded for earthly goods, heaven is given up and earth is accepted—the most disastrous transaction conceivable.

I often asked the few monks who tried to find nourishment in Sacred Scriptures what sweetness they experienced and savored. Most of them answered that as often as they fell into—I do not know what—literal sense, especially when they tried to understand the divine psalms, they became utterly sad and downcast from their reading.

Then I began to consider seriously that perhaps this had not been the true literal sense but rather, as quacks like to do with herbs, one thing is substituted for the other, a pseudo sense for the true literal sense. Therefore I went immediately for advice to our first leaders, I mean the apostles, the Gospel writers, and the prophets, who first entrusted the seed to the furrows of our souls and opened the door of understanding of the letter of Sacred Scripture, and I seemed to see another sense of Scripture: the intention of the prophet and of the Holy Spirit speaking in him. This I call "literal" sense but a literal sense which coincides with the Spirit. No other letter has the Spirit conveyed to the prophets or to those who have open eyes (not that I should want to deny the other sense, the allegorical, tropological, and

anagogical, especially where the content of the text demands it).

To those who do not have open eyes but nevertheless *think* they have, another letter takes its place, which, as the apostle says, kills and opposes the Spirit. This letter is pursued today by the Jews, in whom even now this prophecy is being fulfilled. Their eyes are darkened so that they cannot see and their whole perspective is completely warped. This kind of sense they call literal, not the literal sense of their prophets, to be sure, but rather of certain of their rabbis. These interpret the divine hymns of David for the most part as applying to David himself, to his anxieties during the persecution by Saul and the other wars he fought. They do not regard him in these psalms as a prophet but rather as a chronicler of what he has seen and done, as if he were writing his own history. But David himself says regarding himself, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me, his word is upon my tongue." And divine Scripture calls him the man in all of Israel to whom it was given to sing about the Christ of the God of Jacob and the true Messiah. And where else is this granted to him than in the psalms?

And so I came to believe that there is a two-fold literal sense. The one is the distorted sense of those who have no open eyes and interpret divine things according to the flesh and in human categories. The proper sense is grasped by those who can see and receive insight. The one is the invention of human understanding, the other is a gift of God's Spirit—the false sense depresses, the other bears it up on high. Hence there seems to be good reason for the complaint of those monks that as often as they fell for "literal" exposition they came away from it somber and upset. All their religious devotion had suddenly collapsed and had completely disappeared, as if ice water had been thrown on a burning fire. For just as the healthy

body is aware of what is harmful to it, so also the spirit is aware of what threatens it. Therefore it is not without good reason that I feel this kind of letter should be avoided and that one should aspire to that sense which is animated by the Spirit, as colors are by light.

With this goal in mind, I have tried to write a short exposition of the psalms with the assistance of Christ, who is the key to the understanding of David and about whom David spoke, commissioned by the Holy Spirit, in the book of Psalms. In order that it might be more obvious how great the difference is between the proper and improper sense, I offer a few examples which demonstrate this. Let us first take Psalm 2: "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves up and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed." For the rabbinic interpreters, the literal meaning of the text is that the inhabitants of Palestine revolted against David, the anointed one of the Lord. But Paul and the other apostles take the literal sense to refer to the Anointed of the Lord, the true Messiah and the true Son of God (which is both true and appropriate).

For the rabbinic interpreters, the literal meaning of Psalm 18 is that David expresses thanks to God for being liberated from the hands of Saul and his other enemies. Paul has taken the literal sense to mean the Anointed One of the Lord. The rabbis understand Psalm 19 to deal with the first giving of the law. Paul takes it to be not the first but the second giving of the law when through the blessed apostles and their successors it was promulgated to all nations. Furthermore, the rabbis, in a literal interpretation of Psalms 1 and 21, refer them to the persecution of the Israelites in the time of Artaxerxes. Matthew, John, and Paul, full of God, took the psalms to refer, in a literal sense, to those things which happened to

the Anointed of the Lord, the King of Glory, in his passion.

But it would be tedious to go through each psalm to show that what the rabbis contrive to be the literal sense is not the literal sense at all, but rather a fiction and a lie. Isaiah appropriately prophesied these things when he said: "For they are a rebellious people, lying sons, sons who will not hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, 'See not,' and to the prophets, 'Prophesy not to us what is right, speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, level the way, turn away from the path, let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel.'"

Certainly those who see such "smooth things" see errors and stray from the true way, which is the Anointed One, and "turn away from the path" so that they cannot see "the Holy One of Israel," which is Christ Jesus, the most highly blessed forever.

How, therefore, can we rely on the interpretation of those whom God has stricken with blindness and terror, and not fear that when a blind man offers us guidance we will fall into a ditch together? It is impossible for us to believe this one to be the literal sense which they call the literal sense, that which makes David a historian rather than a prophet. Instead, let us call that the literal sense which is in accord with the Spirit and is pointed out by the Spirit. "We know," says Paul, the spokesman of God, "that the law is spiritual," and if it *is* spiritual, how could the literal sense, if it is really to be the sense of the law, not be spiritual? Therefore the literal sense and the spiritual sense coincide. This true sense is not what is called the allegorical or tropological sense, but rather the sense the Holy Spirit intends as he speaks through the prophet. It has been our total purpose to draw out of this sense all the Holy Spirit has put into it.

Now, if anyone would hold against me that I have not done this as worthily as I should, I would be most ready to grant it. For who can interpret in a fitting manner a prophet who is not himself a prophet nor has received the spirit of a prophet? I cannot say that of myself nor do I claim what is described by Homer: "We are not led by man's divinations, but with my own eyes I have seen, and with my own ears I have heard, that God revealed all those things by bringing them to light."

But those by whose "divinations" I am led and whom I follow were able to say this [that they saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears], and above all the joint witness of their Scriptures has been our abiding guide.

But perhaps there will be others who will stamp this enterprise of ours as redundant, since I am writing after Didymus, Origen, Arnobius, and Cassiodorus commented on the psalms. We shall answer that these Fathers treated everything most clearly, but that what they have done elaborately we shall treat succinctly. They worked with several senses; we have been intent on one primarily, namely, that sense which is the intention of both the Holy Spirit and the prophet. They had only one text of the psalms available, so that Augustine, for example, worked with the Old Psalter which is less reliable than the others. Therefore he was often forced to make excurses without relation to the text. Cassiodorus followed the Roman Psalter, and others have worked with the text that was available to them. We have consulted various text traditions, so that from these we could truly establish the original sense.

From H. A. Oberman, ed., *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 297–301.



Moral Instruction

9. *The Fasciculus Morum* (Fourteenth Century)

Moral instruction in the late medieval church took place in the contexts of catechesis, the sacrament of penance, and preaching. Given the often abysmal educational level of the ordinary parish priest, we can well imagine that many were at a loss as to what to say to their parishioners on Sunday morning. Hence the need for manuals to assist them. The one represented here by an anonymous fourteenth-century writer deals with the traditional seven deadly sins: pride, wrath, envy, avarice, sloth, gluttony, and lechery. It gives us a glimpse into how the church expected parish pastors to preach; it shows us the kind of illustrations, jokes, and anecdotes that ought to enliven the ideal sermon; and it illustrates the kind of moral instruction the faithful were subjected to. It is noteworthy that in this particular handbook, far more space is devoted to the sin of sloth than any other sin. In other handbooks and especially in manuals for confessors, it is often sexual sins that receive the most attention.

What Sloth Is

After completing Part IV on the vice which especially serves the world, namely avarice and covetousness, together with the opposite virtues, we now come in the fifth place to treat those vices that spring from the stinking and corrupt flesh as its evil and damnable offspring, namely sloth, gluttony, and lechery, together with their opposite virtues, that is, holy activity, abstinence, and continence.

About sloth I shall proceed as follows: first I shall deal with what it is and how it is defined;

second, with its characteristics and to what things it can be compared; and third, why it is harmful and rightly cursed. First, then, I say that sloth is boredom with respect to the good, or fearfulness. Now, to the devil, everything good is boring; therefore, this sin may rightly be said to serve not only the flesh but also the devil. Its characteristic is to want always to be at ease, even to reign with God if possible, and yet never to be busy but at all times to lie idle.

It can therefore be compared to a servant of whom Petrus Alphonsi speaks in his book *On Clerical Knowledge*. When his master ordered him at night to lock the doors after he had gone to bed, the servant replied, lying: "They are already shut." And when his master woke him in the morning to open the doors, he said: "I knew that you wanted them open; therefore I would not shut them last night." And when his master told him again: "It is day. Get up and do your work!" he replied: "If it is day, give me my dinner." Then his master said to him: "It would be a shame for you to eat at night [i.e., since you get hungry again in the morning]." And the servant came back with: "If it is night, let me go to sleep." Thus, indeed, it goes with lazy, slothful people. You cannot ask them for anything to cast off their torpor and laziness without their having excuses freely ready, especially if they ought to endure any hardship for God's sake, such as in fasting, vigils, prayers, and the like. The first of these a slothful man cannot undertake because it would weaken his body; neither can he undertake the second because he gets a headache or eye-ache; nor the third either because he does not know the Our Father and other prayers, and if he does, he gets a swollen tongue and lips.

And yet they are perfectly capable of sitting and waking by the cup all day long and all the night, as it frequently happens, and of uttering

useless things. Bernard challenges such people in a devout meditation, saying: "O ungrateful lazybones, why can you not endure anything for me, who have endured so much for you? Perhaps you say your head hurts and you have heartburn, which probably come from eating too much. Do I not have my head crowned for you and my heart pierced with a sharp spear? Your hands and feet are being eaten by worms that come from your corrupt humors, and I have both hands and both feet pierced for your sake with sharp nails and have them stuck on the cross. Is your body naked and worn thin by fasting? Look at me, I pray, how I am even more naked, worn, and despoiled on the gibbet. Do people rise against you with words? But nearly everybody shouts against me: 'Crucify, crucify him!' On you, some people have pity, but of me all people make fun. You are lying low, so that your shame may be somewhat hidden; but I am tormented high up in the air, that I may appear openly contemptible to everyone."

Such slothful people may therefore be compared to bums who sit all day long in the sun and do no work but refuse the burden of any good activity. Therefore they do not belong to the number of those whom Christ called to rest from their earthly labor when he said, in Matthew 11: "Come to me, all you that labor, and I will refresh you," that is, with eternal happiness.

They are also like the cuckoo, who does not hatch its own eggs but puts them into the nest of another bird and eats the other bird's eggs. In this way the slothful person lives off other people's labor, and what others have gained by hard and painful work, he eats up in idleness; the psalmist says: "They devour the poor man in secret," that is, the sustenance on which the poor should live. But that is food which perishes and does not last into eternal life, as the *Gloss* on John says: "The food that perishes is the bread

which idle people eat who do no work in either the active or the contemplative life." Whence Chrysostom says in homily 14 of his *Imperfect Work on Matthew*, commenting on the words "Our daily bread": "He adds the word 'daily' to forbid luxurious food, so that we should eat only as much as our nature reasonably requires, not as much as our appetite craves. For if one spends as much on one dinner as might be enough for a hundred people who live modestly, one does not eat 'daily' food but food for many days." For this reason such people may well be called wasps or degenerate bees, which do not produce honey but consume it; as the psalmist says: "Strangers will plunder his labors."

Third, I say that such people may be likened to certain noblemen who hold on to their vineyards so tightly that they share them with no one but preserve it all for their heirs; but when the latter get these possessions into their hands, they waste and consume them without measure and reason. Thus, spiritually, many people today give their bodies over to idleness without doing any useful work, so that when their bodies come to their heirs, which are worms and snakes, the latter will eat them without measure and reason, according to the words of Ecclesiasticus 10: "When a man dies, he shall inherit serpents, beasts, and worms." And then he will, against his desire, give to the worms what he now refuses to give to divine worship or good deeds.

As a warning to such people there is a good story about a rich man who had three sons. As he wanted to know which of them was the worthiest to possess his heritage, he promised it to the laziest. When the oldest son heard this, he said: "Father, the heritage belongs to me, for I am so lazy that, if I were lying next to a fire and saw it spread all around me, I would rather let my feet and legs burn than draw them back from the fire." To whom the second brother

replied: "Not so, but the heritage belongs to me. For if I were lying in a rainstorm and water were continuously dripping into my eyes, I would rather drown than move my head or close my eyelids." But when the third brother had heard this, he said: "Then the heritage is rightly mine, for I am so lazy that, if I were being led to the gallows with a rope around my neck and had a sharp sword in my hand, I would rather hang than cut the rope." By the first brother we can morally understand a lecher, who would rather be consumed in his burning lust than draw the feet of his evil affection from it. By the second we can understand the covetous person, who would rather go blind than close the eye of his mind to covetousness, because just as drops that fall constantly blind the eyes of our body, so do riches blind the eyes of our mind. And by the third we can understand a proud man, or anyone that is caught and bound in any other sin, who would rather be drawn to hell by the rope of evil habit and be hanged there than free himself in confession with the sword of his tongue.

Therefore it is well said in Proverbs 26: "As the door turns upon its hinges, so does the slothful upon his bed," that is, in the bed of his perverse desire, from which he cannot escape any more easily than a fish from the net or a bird from the lime, because he is completely wrapped up and bound by the net and lime of the devil. Hence a lazy person can well be called "a door upon its hinges," because many such people lie indolent in the bed of somnolence that they would much rather snuggle in its warmth beyond a reasonable time than go to church and attend mass and God's service. And when at last they have got up, they hurry rather to the table than to church. If they should finally get there, it seems to them that they are standing on glowing coals, and so they can hardly stay there at all, whereas they really

ought to remain until they are given leave to return home from church. This happens when mass is over and the priest says, "Go, the mass is ended," as if he were saying: this mass has been sent to the Father; therefore, go, that is, in the Lord's name return to your homes.

There are also some people of this kind who do not care about the mass except to get the blessed bread and holy water, and that, they think, is enough. They do not consider the fact that when the priest receives the body of Christ, he does so not only for himself but for all the faithful who are present or who would want to be if they somehow could; further, that the priest explicitly mentions "all here present" in the canon of the mass. It is therefore manifest that all who can be present and do not want to, lose the benefit of the mass, as far as this lies in their power. And many do not even care about the blessed bread and water. Perhaps that is so because they do not understand their value. . . .

The Nature of Lechery

Now, in the last place, we pass on to deal with lechery, the third and worst daughter of the flesh, and its members. Like a public whore, this vice is not ashamed to lie with anybody; whence it is rightly deemed to be accursed. Following it, we will deal with its opposite virtue, namely continence and purity, and its members. Concerning lechery I plan to proceed as follows: first, I will discuss what it is and how it is defined; second, its occasions and from where it originates; third, the species that follow it; and fourth, why those who fear God curse it.

On the first point we should know that lechery is variously defined by various authors. Some say: "Lechery is the failure to observe moderation in a soul that perversely loves bodily pleasures." Another author says: "Lechery is bodily incontinence which is born of or

has its origin in the itching of our flesh.” Yet another definition is this: “Lechery is the desire to have sex which rises beyond measure and against reason.” And a fourth definition, according to Bernard, declares: “Lechery is drunken thirst, a momentary outburst, eternal bitterness; it shuns the light, seeks darkness, and entirely plunders man’s mind.”

The Sex Act

The fifth occasion of lechery clearly lies in the sex act itself, of which it is said in Galatians 4: “The works of the flesh are manifest, which are uncleanness,” etc. Against them is given the commandment of Deuteronomy 3: “Go well prepared, without your wives, children, and cattle.” Notice that “wife” here means the flesh, to which one is married when one pampers and loves it immoderately. Her “children” are harmful delights and forbidden desires. And the “cattle” are the deeds of the flesh and animal-like acts. Therefore these three—wife, children, and cattle—are to be locked up in a fortified city, meaning they are to be reined in by the well-taught soul so that they do not go forth with us into battle. For whoever has these three with him is not well prepared but rather burdened down. Solinus in *The Marvels of the World* says that when the hyena has looked at an animal three times, the latter cannot move. This hyena is our flesh; it looks three times at those whom it binds to the aforementioned three. And therefore it is said in Joshua 1: “Your wives and children and cattle shall remain; but you pass over armed,” as if to say: leave your fleshly desires and pleasures and works behind through the deeds of penance, and go forward against the vices armed with good virtues. If you do that, surely the words of Deuteronomy 7 will come true of you: “No one shall be barren among you of either sex.” For when the spirit rules over the flesh, both sexes are fertile and

bring forth the good fruit of virtues. Conversely, when the flesh rules over the spirit, both become sterile with respect to good habits. For Pliny says that when a goat licks an olive-tree, it renders it barren. The goat, which according to the philosopher is a bad-smelling and unclean animal, and smells worse behind than in front, symbolizes the flesh whose lusts and deeds are found to be ever more ugly and evil the more often they occur. But the olive-tree is man’s mind; it is licked when the flesh with its fondling draws off its strength. Thus it is no wonder if the flesh does not allow it to yield fruit. Hence it is said in Jeremiah 22: “Write this man barren.”

Concerning the flesh and its works it is written in Revelation 13: “I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns and spoke like a dragon.” In spiritual terms, this beast is fleshly concupiscence, which rises from the earth of our flesh and has two horns, namely gluttony and lust, which do not look very terrifying and yet are quite deceptive. They are like the horns of a wanton lamb, because they invite to wantonness and yet in the end lead to insolence. This beast “spoke like a dragon.” The dragon sends from his mouth poisonous breath; in the same way, the flesh stirs us to talk in this fashion. Hence there is hardly anyone who does not follow or hunt after wantonness in some manner, as can be seen in the variety of vanities, be it in food or clothing or gestures or speech or song or one’s way of walking and similar wretched customs of the flesh that lead to damnation. Develop this point as you see fit.

And notice that in addition to these five occasions of lechery there are further the solicitations of old women called go-betweens, who cause many men and women to retreat from their good intention to live in continence and cleanness. They do the devil’s work. For the

devil's work is, above all, to strive with all diligence to cast people into sin and drown them. Now, when the devil himself cannot achieve this in people of great moral strength by his own ruses, he sends these go-betweens, full of wretched tricks, as his messengers to lure the minds of men and women into the sins of the flesh. Thus we can see that they are more powerful in evil than the devil himself and may be called the devil's coaches. Of them it is well said in Proverbs 16 that "the wrath of a king is the messenger of death." If David ordered to kill the man who seemingly brought good news, namely Saul's death, in 1 Kings 1, what do you think the heavenly David, that is, Christ, will do to those who, as it were, bring news of the fires of hell? Surely: King David could only inflict temporal death, but Christ can give eternal death; therefore, etc. Hence those cursed old women may be called sisters of the serpent that deceived Eve. According to Bede, the serpent has the face of a maiden, and this stands for those go-betweens that have been chosen by the devil to deceive our souls. Of them is said in Joel 1: "The girl they have sold for wine." But after the psalm, "their wine is the gall of dragons, and the venom of asps, which is incurable."

Observe the following: If a preacher of God's Word were to win a single soul in all his life, he would do a great thing, because that soul, redeemed with the blood of Christ, is worth more than all the goods of the world. Therefore, if one of those go-betweens were to do no other evil in all her days than ruin a single soul, she would do a lot. But since no sacrifice pleases the devil as much as the ruin of souls, therefore—since this is what these go-betweens do—no sin is greater than theirs, as is plain to see. It lies in the nature of a noble falcon to fly up high, and yet he is often lured by the fowler's trick to come down, namely by means of some pigeon craftily set on the ground to lure him. In the

same fashion, young women who climb up high on the way of chastity are tricked by the fowler of hell by means of such go-betweens that are assigned to this job.

For this we have a story about a young woman who loved her chastity but was loved unchastely and against her will by a cleric. As the cleric could make no headway in having her to his will, he thought of a ruse and secretly consulted such a go-between. When the latter had been hired by him, she took a bitch and starved it for two or three days. Then, on the fourth day, she fed it black bread and very sharp pepper, which made water and tears burst from its eyes. Then she took the bitch and went to the maiden's house. When the girl asked about the cause of the bitch's tears, the old dame answered, as if sad and grieving: "Alas, my daughter, woe to me. For God's sake, don't ask any further about this matter!" But when, like a woman, the girl was tempted even more to know the cause, the wretched dame at last answered with pretended tears: "This bitch you see thus crying once was my beloved daughter and was deeply loved by a cursed cleric. When he could not lure her with words or gifts to love him, he died of grief. But God in his anger took vengeance and changed my daughter into the shape of this bitch who is constantly weeping and mourning for her folly." When the girl heard this, she got frightened and said: "Alas, dear mother, what shall I do? For I am in the same case and condition. I implore you to give me your advice." Then she answered: "If you want to live, call the young man quickly and do his will in everything." That is what happened, and thus she tricked the girl. Wherefore it is well said: "I have found a woman more bitter than death," as if to say: in the course of nature, death can only catch one person at a time, but that wretched dame ruined three at once—herself and two others.

The Branches of Lechery

Fornication

As to the branches of this vice, there are several. The first may be said to be fornication, which is said to be more detestable than homicide or violent theft because the latter are not as evil in their substance as fornication is. For example, it is possible that someone wants to kill someone else by right, as does a judge out of love for justice; and likewise someone may steal someone else's goods out of great need. But no one can knowingly fornicate in any other way than by committing a mortal sin; therefore, etc. And thus, as can be seen in Numbers 25, when Israel had fornicated with the daughters of Moab, the Lord commanded their princes to be hanged. Therefore, we must understand that while fornication is any forbidden sexual intercourse, it particularly refers to intercourse with widows, prostitutes, or concubines. But the term "prostitute" must be applied only to those women who give themselves to anyone and will refuse none, and that for monetary gain.

People who claim that simple fornication is not a mortal sin because it is a natural act have to be shown the following three arguments in order: first, that it is absolutely forbidden; second, that it must be completely rejected; and third, that it has been called "diabolical" by the Lord. First, then, that simple fornication is absolutely forbidden is manifest from the commandments as in Deuteronomy 23: "There shall be no whore among the daughters of Israel"; and Exodus 24: "Thou shalt not commit fornication"; and 1 Corinthians 6: "Flee fornication"; and Galatians 5: "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication," etc.; and the text continues: "They who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God." Thus the first argument is manifest.

Violating a Virgin

The second branch of lechery is violating, that is, unlawfully deflowering, a virgin. This is much to be detested. For as can be seen in Genesis 34, when Shechem, the son of Hamor, deflowered Dinah, he and his father and the entire population of the town were killed for this sin. Likewise, once the good of virginity has thus been lost, it is irrecoverable, just as a glass vessel cannot be made whole again once it has been broken; whence the psalmist says: "My heart is become like a vessel that is destroyed." Orosius tells in book 4 that Hannibal, the leader of the Carthaginians, though he was such a great champion that, as a sign of his victory, he had sent to Carthage three measures of gold rings taken from the fingers of rich Romans that had been killed, yet after being undefeated in battle he was, as Valerius reports in book 4, captured and overcome by the fire of lechery. And the Chartrian concludes from this reasonably that a prince's reign cannot stand for long or remain if it is corrupted by lechery.

Adultery

The third branch of lechery is adultery, which is the unlawful approaching of another man's marriage bed. It can be divided into two species, namely, adultery between a married and a single person, and adultery between two married persons. That adultery is a crime is obvious from the fact that, first, it goes against the common sacrament of marriage which God instituted in paradise in the state of innocence. Moreover, Christ himself in his sinlessness deigned to be born in wedlock—not only in the purity of virginity but also in the honorable state of matrimony—that he might show how eminently worthy this sacrament is. And that one should more earnestly refrain from violating this sacrament, he laid the offense under a grave penalty, for in Leviticus 20 it is said: "If a

man has defiled another man's wife and committed adultery, let them be put to death, both the adulterer and the adulteress." And in Numbers 5 it is similarly written: "Since you have gone away from your husband and have been defiled and have lain with another man, these curses shall light upon you: May the Lord make you a curse and an example to all among his people; may he make your thigh rot, and may your womb burst asunder."

In his book *On the Nature of Things*, Alexander reports that once there were two storks; the female sat on her eggs in the nest to hatch them, and the male flew about the country to seek food for himself and his mate. It so happened that while she was left behind in her nest she committed adultery with other storks. Out of her natural instinct then, lest her husband on his return should notice the smell of adultery, she washed herself in a spring that was in front of the gate of a knight. After she had done so twice or three times, the knight, who had noticed this, had the spring closed off. When she came as usual to wash herself but could not, she returned to her nest unclean. Upon his return at night, her mate perceived her smell and tore her completely to pieces in revenge for her adultery. This applies spiritually to God and man's soul, which God has taken to himself as his spouse, according to the words of Hosea: "I will espouse you to myself in faith." God leaves her here, as if in the nest of this world, so that she may bring forth good works. She does not need to worry about her livelihood, only about living a good life, because God himself will supply all her needs, after the words of Isaiah: "Learn to do well," etc., because "if you are willing and listen to me, you shall eat the good things of the land." But the wretched soul commits adultery with other wretches, and when she becomes afraid of the judgment, washes herself in the fountain of

penance. This penance is in front of the door of the confessor, of which the psalmist speaks as follows: "This is the gate of the Lord; the just shall enter into it." In front of this door must be the wellspring of penance and the water of contrition. After she washes herself, the stench of sin disappears totally. Hence God, too, covers up our sins; Wisdom 2: "You have mercy upon all because you can do all things, and you overlook the sins of men because of their repentance." Now it frequently happens that since God offers such mercy, the wretched soul relapses into sin. And when she wants to wash herself through penance as usual, she is often prevented from doing so by sudden vengeance, because the wellspring of contrition is closed off by the knight of death. Therefore, as Ecclesiasticus 15 fittingly speaks to sinful man: "Do not delay to turn to the Lord," etc., "for his wrath shall come of a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy you."

Incest

The fourth branch of lechery is connected with the previous ones; it is called incest, which means sexual intercourse with a person related by blood or spiritual kinship. How grave this sin is can be seen in three ways. First, by the punishment established for it in the law; for in Leviticus 18 it is said: "Every soul that commits any of these abominations shall perish from the midst of the people." In this passage Scripture speaks specifically of incest and the sin against nature. Second, according to 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle has given people who sin in this fashion over to Satan for punishment. Third, its gravity is further seen in its evil consequences. For it leads to manslaughter, as we find in Amnon, in 1 Kings 12, who corrupted his sister, for which he was killed by his brother Absalom. Tell the entire story. Similarly, this vice makes a man like a dog, who

pays no attention to his blood relationship when it comes to sex.

Notice that this branch comprises lechery among clerics and religious. Their sin is more grievous than that of other people; therefore Bernard says: "Where there is a greater gift of grace, the transgressor is liable to greater punishment"; and the same is true of his guilt. Notice also that the sin of people in this state is made more grievous by three reasons. The first is that they break their vow. Two circumstances can aggravate the sin of theft, namely the value of what is stolen and its size—for one's neighbor suffers greater harm in this case—and also its sanctity, for in the latter case a thief does not merely commit theft but also sacrilege. Now when a cleric commits a sexual sin, he loses that chastity which he had promised to maintain when he received holy orders, and it is thus irrecoverable; Ecclesiasticus 26: "No price is worthy of a continent soul." The second reason is that a cleric belongs to God's household and lives on its budget. If he then commits lechery with the goods of God, he is to be expelled from his service like a traitor. Whence Bernard says: "Woe to those who walk in the flesh, for they cannot please God." Therefore, when they break their vow, they bring greater harm upon themselves and consequently incur a greater penalty, because it is better not to make a vow than to make it and then break it voluntarily. The third reason is that they deceive the people on whose alms they live and for whom they promise to pray; but they hardly fulfill their promises at all or do so in a state of sin and uncleanness. Therefore Gregory says: "We live off the church's patrimony and receive from it our food and drink. If we do not pray in return, indeed we eat and drink the people's sins."

With regard to sexual sins of the religious, which fall under incest, we should know that this sin is made more grievous for five reasons

in particular. The first can be found in the fact that, as we read in Genesis 7, this was the cause of the flood. If, as is written there, it displeased God so much that the sons of God took the daughters of men as their wives, how much must those fear to displease him who commit fornication with them! The second reason derives from the notion of apostasy. A person is called an "apostate" when he audaciously abandons his religious habit. But the virtue of chastity belongs more intimately to the religious life than the habit; therefore it is plain that abandoning chastity is much more grievous than abandoning one's habit. Hence it is said in Proverbs 6: "An apostate is an unprofitable man." The third aggravating factor is that, obviously, the devil tries very hard to bring a religious person to a fall, since he rejoices more over the fall of one religious than over that of many other people.

Sodomy

The fifth and last branch of lechery is the diabolical sin against nature called sodomy. I pass it over in horror and leave it to others to describe it.

The commentator on Virgil reports that when the Greeks were devastating Ilion, that is, Troy, they found there the daughter of Priam, by the name of Cassandra, in the temple of Minerva. The good knight Ajax was so overcome by her beauty that he raped the maiden. For that deed Minerva, the goddess of chastity, took the following revenge on him: when he was sailing back to his homeland, she stirred up the elements on the sea and the sea itself violently and sent lightning bolts and flashes from above, whereby she tossed the ship on a rock so that he and all his companions perished in the tempest. This Cassandra raped by Ajax symbolizes any woman who engages in sex with any fornicator against the will of God and

his church. Minerva, the goddess of chastity, stands for Christ. What wonder, then, if Christ takes vengeance on those who scorn his commandment by getting involved, not just in simple fornication but in that vile and abominable sin against nature that is not to be named? To be sure, it is no wonder at all.

An explicit type of this occurs in Genesis 19, in Sodom and Gomorrah, which are five cities of that region. Not only did fire and sulfur falling from above kill people and animals, but the earth opened its mouth and swallowed all the living. Thus it is certain that on account of the said sin they perished forever in hell. As an open sign the sea there remains dead even in our days; no living being can submerge or remain in it; and it is all for just revenge in horror of such a sin. As it is said in the book *On the Nature of Things*, if a burning light is thrown into this sea, it floats on the surface and cannot drown until it is put out, as a sign that nothing alive that is done in the light of grace for those for whose sake such vengeance was taken is of any use. And a further testimony, according to writers on natural history and several moderns who have observed this with their own eyes, is that while the apples that grow on the shore of that sea are most beautiful to look at, when they are ripe and are cut open they give forth a sulfurous smoke and dusty ashes. The same applies to those evil lechers who are devoted to the aforementioned abhorrent sins: though they show great external beauty in their body, like green apples, the riper they grow, the more they give forth a sickening ash in their lust that burns and smells like sulfur. Therefore, according to Augustine, “God hated this vice so much that, seeing it being committed by men before his incarnation, he almost refrained from becoming a man.” And thus God did not want to entrust any angel or man with the execution of this punishment but kept its ven-

geance for himself, after the words: “Revenge is mine, and I will repay.”

From S. Wenzel, ed. and trans., *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth Century Preacher's Handbook* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 399–405, 649, 663–69, 677–79, 683–89.



Theology

10. Thomas Bradwardine, *The Cause of God against the Pelagians* (ca. 1344)

One important item on the busy theological agenda of the late Middle Ages was the subject of justification, the Christian understanding of how human beings become righteous before God. Thomas Bradwardine (d. 1349), English archbishop and theologian, staked out his position on this issue in his book *The Cause of God against the Pelagians* (ca. 1344). Labeling his contemporary theological opponents as “Pelagians,” Bradwardine defended the Augustinian teaching. In this excerpt from his book, Bradwardine argues that the logic of this position leads inexorably to a strong doctrine of predestination.

The Pelagians now oppose our whole presentation of predestination and reprobation, attempting either to eliminate them completely or, at least, to show that they are dependent on personal merits.

[The “Pelagian” Arguments]

1. They use the following arguments: God does nothing unreasonable and there is no reason why he should predestine or reprobate one man rather than another. Therefore, he either predestines and reprobates everyone or no one. And since there is a consensus that not everyone is predestined or rejected, they conclude

that no one is. Or, if they grant that there be such a thing as a reason for predestination or reprobation, this reason can then only be based on several different kinds of merit.

2. Thus Abbot Joachim of Flora (d.1202) in his dialogues with Benedict assigns two reasons or causes for the election, predestination, and mercy of God, of which the first is man's own capacity for mercy, salvation, and goodness, and the second is the good act itself. He assigns opposite causes and reasons for reprobation.

3. The Gospel of John states: "He gave them power to become sons of God." Since, therefore, in accordance with predestination and grace men become sons of God, this lies within their own free power and occurs in no other way than by merits acceptable to God.

4. The psalmist agrees with this when, after reciting certain sins, he says, "Let them [the sinners] be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous."

5. Again the Apocalypse says, "Hold fast what you have, lest anyone should seize your crown," which is the crown God has promised to his elect.

6. Likewise, if Adam had not sinned no one would have been reprobated. Therefore, predestination or reprobation corresponds to individual merit.

7. Likewise, since it would be unfair and cruel for either man or an angel to harm someone without provocation, and such an action would be necessarily unjust, how much less befitting would such action be for a God who is the most right and the most righteous? Nor would it befit God that anyone should be reprobated and predestined to eternal fire unless it were done on account of preceding guilt.

[The "Augustinian" Responses]

1. The first of these arguments is unreasonable and can be answered with complete clarity by referring to the argumentation of previous

chapters [that is, the sovereign God, creator and redeemer, cannot be dependent on anything outside of him].

2. Now turning to the support drawn from Joachim, it should be pointed out that although Joachim was a great doctor, he did not have great authority. He was an Arian in his Trinitarian doctrine, as is clear from the book he wrote against Peter Lombard, *On the Trinity*, and from his condemnation by Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council. And just as he was an Arian in Trinitarian doctrine he was a Pelagian in attributing the original cause of predestination and reprobation, not to the God who predestines and reprobates but to man's own capacity and to the actions of the men predestined or reprobated, as indicated above.

Nevertheless, he tried to avoid the most extreme Pelagian position by asserting that the cause of divine election and reprobation was man's own capacity for mercy or wrath, not his capacity for works or acts themselves. When Benedict asks what the capacity for good and evil might be if not for good and evil works, as the apostle says about Isaac and Jacob, Joachim answers that this capacity is not an act but "a repository of grace or wrath from which the good and evil works have their origin." And farther on he says that when God elects certain men he does not look for righteousness in them, for he himself will give them that. The only factors necessary are humility and wretchedness, that is to say, "a propensity for mercy." Thus in approaching too close to the banks of the Pelagian flood he slips over and is sucked completely into the whirlpool, when he says that one's merits are the cause of predestination and reprobation.

As I briefly reconstruct the diffuse course of his argument, he means to say that humility is the cause of predestination, and pride the cause of reprobation, for he claims that the state of

despair and misery is the underlying cause of divine election—as the apostle says, “Brother, look to your calling because not many are wise according to the flesh but those whom the world thinks foolish, God chooses.”

As one reads farther it becomes clear that man is claimed by God, not for his righteousness but for his wretchedness, not for his works but for his need, not for his strength but for his weakness, not for his wisdom but for his foolishness, not for his high station but for his obscurity. “Just as the Pharisee of the biblical account is rejected for his righteousness, so the publican is chosen for his sin. This does not mean that God loves unrighteousness or hates the purity of innocence, but rather that he rejects self-righteousness and has mercy on the humble penitence of the sinner.”

And later Joachim says the causes of election are despair and affliction, “not because these things in themselves please God but because they give birth to humility, the sole virtue required by God of men and angels.” And again he says that because “the Lord had foreknowledge of the pride of the people of Israel he hated and rejected them.”

All of this makes it quite obvious that Joachim contradicts himself. How can it be possible for man’s own capacity to be the cause of predestination or reprobation when sometimes, between two of equal capacity, one is chosen and one is abandoned or, at other times, the one of lesser capacity is chosen while the one of greater is abandoned? How can despair and misery be the cause of divine predestination when, as I suspect, many men who in this world live in despair, misery, and poverty are ultimately rejected, while others who have always enjoyed high station, prosperity, and wealth are predestined unto life? Among the holy angels who have been predestined and ultimately confirmed there was never any

despair or misery, for they were never guilty or subject to punishment. And above all what is the misery and despair which, according to Joachim’s theory, caused Christ’s predestination, he whom St. Paul calls the “Son of God in power”?

Joachim’s whole position could be “reprobated” by other arguments, but since so few of his arguments hold, these few of my rebuttals will suffice.

3. Now when they bring forward the quotation from the Gospel of John, “He gave them power to become sons of God,” they seem to wish to conclude from this that some become or can become the elect sons of God in the course of their life. That is, that from the number of those who are not predestined or who are reprobate, some at the present time can become predestined and at the same time cease to belong to the reprobate. This conflicts with what has been established in Chapters 23 and 45 and, furthermore, contains evident contradictions in itself as can plainly be shown from these chapters.

The quotation from the Gospel of John seems rather to prove the opposite. For he did not say, “He gave them power to make themselves sons of God,” but “to be made sons of God.” But by whom? Not by themselves. Not out of their own will. Whoever has produced himself? Whoever was born out of himself? What son of the devil can give birth to himself and appear to be the son of God? Hear what follows: “who are born not from human flesh or will but from God.” Therefore they do not make themselves sons of God. God does this.

Furthermore Aristotle shows that power, or capability, is of two kinds, active and passive. Now that which is meant by the quotation, “He gave them power to become sons of God,” is also asserted in Romans, “Whoever are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” God gives

men power, that is to say, a rational soul and free will with which man can freely and voluntarily receive grace in the present and glory in the future so that, in both the present and the future, they might become sons of God. Thus in the present, as they are being made sons of God by faith and prevenient grace, which makes them into adopted sons of God, they freely accomplish the pleasing work of sons and so freely persevere in this to such an extent that no one could take away their sonship unless they would permit it.

Chrysostom supports this argument in his exegesis of the text which indicates that there is need of much zeal to preserve unspoiled the image with which man is endowed in the baptism of adoption. At the same time, however, he indicates that no one can take this power away from us but ourselves and that this grace comes to those who zealously desire it. Indeed it is in the power of free will and grace to become sons of God by their joint operation.

And Augustine, commenting on John, asks, "Why were all born in sin?" That we are children of Adam implies damnation by necessity. But to be children of Christ is man's act through his will and through grace, since men are not forced to become children of Christ. Even though they did not choose to be born children of Adam, all of them are sinners in the true sense of the word. All those who are children of Christ are justified and are just, not because of themselves but because of Christ." He does not say, "He gave them power to become sons of God," as if only man were included and God excluded in this process. Nor did he give man the priority while making God a subordinate factor. Therefore John says, "He gave them power to become sons of God," not "to make themselves sons of God." And again, "They are born not out of the will of flesh nor out of the

will of men but out of God who is the origin and author of this divine birth."

Furthermore, Bede is quoted as saying, "The carnal begetting of each individual is due to the conjugal embrace, but his spiritual begetting is due to the grace of the Holy Spirit." And Chrysostom said, "St. John the evangelist tells us this so that learning the weakness and humility of the first birth, which takes place through blood and the will of flesh, and knowing the sublimity of the second, which is through grace and excellence, we might receive from this text a profound understanding appropriate to the gift of him who begets us, and show the appropriate zeal."

And Augustine said, preaching on this passage from John, "To as many as received him he gave power to become sons of God." If they became children, they were born. If they were born, whatever may have caused it, it was not flesh or blood or the will of flesh or the will of men but God. Let them rejoice, therefore, that they are born of God. Let them anticipate their return to God. Let them receive the proof because they are born of God.

And, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." If the Word was not ashamed to be born of men, should man be ashamed to be born of God? Saying "He gave them power to become sons of God" does not at all mean, as Pelagius dreamed, that he gave them power to become sons of God by preceding works of merit. It is inconceivable that St. John could contradict his Lord, who said, as John himself reports, "No one is able to come unto me unless the Father who sent me draws him." And "No one is able to come unto me unless it has been given to him by my father." It is equally inconceivable that he could in such short compass make contradictory assertions. Since following hard on the above he says that the Word was full of grace and truth and then adds, "From

this fullness we have all received grace for grace.” We have received first of all, as I say, grace freely given and truth because we receive grace promised of old and thus grace for grace, that is to say, grace given freely to fulfill the grace promised earlier through the prophets. Secondly, we have received according to our certain hope the grace of beatitude in the future for grace now operative during this dispensation.

Therefore Augustine commenting on John says, “He did not say, ‘And from his fullness we all have received grace for grace,’ but he said, ‘And from his fullness we all have received, and, beyond that, grace for grace.’” Now I do not know what he wants us to understand with the words “have received from the fullness of his grace and, beyond that, grace for grace.” Have we not received from his fullness first grace and then again grace for the grace we have received initially?

Does Augustine mean we receive faith before we receive grace? But we cannot walk in faith without being in grace. How would we ever have received this grace? By our preceding merits? Grace is *given* to you, it is not a payment. For this reason it is called grace, because it is freely given. With preceding merits you cannot buy what you have already received as a gift. Therefore the sinner has received first grace in order that his sins might be forgiven. What has he merited? When he demands justice he will receive punishment and when he asks for mercy he will receive grace. But this is exactly what had been promised by God through the prophets. Therefore when he comes to give what he has promised he gives not only grace but also truth. How is this truth manifested? When that which has been promised is fulfilled. What, in fact, does “grace for grace” mean? By faith we merit God. That you received the immortal reward, that is, eternal

life, is grace. On account of what merit do you receive eternal life? On account of grace. “God crowns His gifts, not your merits.” But this text can also very appropriately be exegeted literally by saying that those who are actually now children of God through faith and grace in this dispensation are granted the power, that is to say, grace helping free will, so that they might become children of God in the future, in the kingdom of heaven.

For this very reason he introduces the statement with “Whoever received him,” that is, by believing in him through faith active in love, “He gave them power to become sons of God.” Therefore Theophilus is quoted in the gloss, “Because we shall attain the most perfect sonship in the resurrection—as the apostle says, we are awaiting the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our bodies—he grants us the power to become sons of God, that is, this grace will be consummated in future grace.”

4. Let us turn now to the objection from Psalm 68 [69], “Let them be erased from the book of the living.” If this is understood with superficial literalness, we must concede that predestination and reprobation are subject to change; it would imply that someone who was previously elected and not reprobated is now reprobated and not elected. If someone can at any time be erased from the book of the living, this contradicts everything that previously has been shown.

It is necessary, therefore, to interpret the quotation in a different way. It can be understood as a deletion in accordance with present justice. Or “let them be erased” could be taken to mean “let them be regarded as erased,” that is, “as never entered in the book,” since the following statement actually says, “Let them not be written with the just.” Or “let them be erased” could be taken to mean that their hope

of being entered in the book is shown to be vain, just as God is said to feel regrets.

Therefore when Augustine interprets this psalm he says, "Brethren, let us not take this to mean that God would have enrolled someone in the book of life and then erased him out of the book. If Pilate, a mere human, insisted that the inscription 'King of the Jews' should stay on Christ's cross once he said, 'What I have written, I have written,' is it not more certain that God would not change his mind?"

God knows in advance, before the foundation of the world he has predestined all who will reign with his Son in eternal life. Those whom he has enrolled are contained in the book of life. How can they be erased from a book where they were never written? This quotation expresses their hope, that is, they thought themselves to have been entered in the book of life. What does this mean, "Let them be erased from the book of life"? It is obvious they were never there to begin with.

Thus, therefore, those who had hoped, by reason of their righteousness, that they were written in the book of God, when confronted by their damnation, are made aware that they are "erased from the book of life," and they realize that they were never there. The second part of the statement ["Let them not be enrolled with the righteous"] explains the first part. As I have said, "Let them be erased" is to be understood to refer to their vain hopes. And this can correctly be summarized by saying, "Let them not be enrolled."

5. Likewise, to those who understand the Apocalypse literally, "Hold what you have" seems to say that it is possible for someone's crown to be taken away at any time and given to another man, and that, therefore, such a one can cease to be predestined and begin to be reprobated, while for the man who takes his place it is the other way around. But all that

has been said does not allow of this. Neither John nor indeed the Spirit in John said or suggested that man through his own strength, without the help of God, holds or can hold his crown, that is, can persevere in a good life and good works until death. Nor did John say that anyone by himself and his own strength, alone without the special help of God, can receive the crown of predestination or grace in the present, or the crown of glory in the future. The following trustworthy words confirm this conclusion: "Thus says the holy and true one who has the key of David, who opens and no one closes, who closes and no one opens: Behold, I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut. Although you have little power, still you have preserved my word. Therefore I shall preserve you from the hour of temptation. Behold I come quickly. Hold fast to what you have, etc." Here it is clearly taught that perseverance depends first of all on divine preservation and secondly on human cooperation. How much the less does the beginning and attainment of an upright life depend on man alone! Therefore the quotation "Hold fast to what you have, etc." means that the good act is preceded and elicited by God's grace in order that man might persevere to the very end. Thus he who heard this exhortation was perhaps predestined [to life eternal] by means of this exhortation, be it from God or man, so that he might persevere to the end and hold fast to his crown.

Augustine said that we should pray that those who have not yet been called might be called; perhaps they have been thus predestined to be won over by our prayers and to accept the grace by which they desire election and actually receive it. For God who has predestined all things will fulfill all. It is possible to exegete the passage from Revelation just like the earlier one of the Psalms; it is possible for man to gain

or lose the crown of life in terms of present justice, that is, in terms of certain hope.

Accordingly, Augustine proves that the gift of final perseverance cannot be lost and he suggests the following clarification for what we mean by its being lost. Because final perseverance actually means persevering until the end, it is possible for many to have it but, by definition, impossible for them to lose it. Let us beware, however, of saying that the gift of final perseverance can never be lost once it has been granted, that is, once one had the ability to persevere until the end. Let us rather say that it is lost in that moment when man rejects the gift so that he cannot reach the goal—just as we say that the man who does not persevere until the end has lost eternal life or the kingdom of God. It is not that he ever actually had it but he would have had it if he had been able to persevere. And let us not quarrel about words, but let us simply say that there are things we can refer to as losing which, in reality, we do not possess but only hope to acquire.

6. The argument that if Adam had not sinned, no one would have been reprobated but all would have been predestined does not prove at all that predestination and reprobation depend on merit. The opposite of this thesis follows obviously. As was shown above, God does not predestine a certain end for man or man for a certain end; that is to say, God does not grant man eternal life on account of his future good works, but, on the contrary, he grants the good works that may bring him to eternal life. But it does not follow the other way around that if man had acted differently God would have drawn up a different eternal plan. The contrary is true.

Take Christ as an example. If Christ had not done good works he would not have been predestined Son of God—this is obviously unten-

able! If Paul had not preached he would not have been elected—or was he elected in order that he might preach? No, the contrary is true. If the sun had never shone or the fire given heat, would they not have been predestined to do so? Have they now been predestined to do so because they actually do it? No, that the sun actually shines and the fire actually heats is because they have been predestined or preordained to do this. Moreover, it is by no means clear that if Adam had not sinned no one would have been reprobated. It seems possible that even if Adam had not sinned, all his descendants would not necessarily have been made sinless and confirmed until the end. Rather, they would have had the freedom to choose or accept good or evil.

But even when we grant Anselm's point that if Adam had not fallen, all his descendants would have remained sinless to the end, still we say with Gregory that none of the reprobate would have been born, but only the predestined. Therefore, the sin of Adam is not the primary cause of reprobation, but rather, as said above, if Adam had not sinned, God would have ordained differently. And when you object to this argument on the grounds that a predestined son may sometimes have a reprobate father, and that such a son would not have had a father at all if Adam had not sinned, and, in that case, not only the *now* predestined but *all* who have been predestined would not have been born, you argue against St. Gregory, not against me. At the same time several things can be said in defense of St. Gregory's position. One answer would be that if Adam had not sinned, only those who are now elect would have been born, that is to say, only that number of those now elect would have been born. If Adam had not sinned, God would have created only those souls as are now given to the elect, although some he might perhaps have joined to

other bodies than they have now. Or, if we wish to keep body and soul together as an elect unit, only those would have been born who are now elect. In that case an elect who has actually been born of a reprobate parent would have instead been born of another father who belongs to the elect.

7. Now we turn to the argument which accuses God of injustice and cruelty. It should be noted that not every punishment appropriately given to one man by another is imposed because of preceding guilt. Sometimes the punishment is given as a warning or for other reasons, as many passages in divine as well as human writings show. As a certain law said, "No one who has not committed a crime ought to be punished unless there be a cause." Both civil and canon law agree on this.

Furthermore, Peter Lombard shows that there are five reasons for man's punishment in this dispensation, which are: (1) the correction of sin, (2) the beginning of punishment for sin, (3) the growth in merits, as it was in the cases of Job and Tobith, (4) the avoidance of sin, as Paul says about the thorn in his flesh, (5) the glory of God, as John makes clear in his passage about the man blind from birth. One can also be publicly punished, to frighten others, to deter them from evil and strengthen them in goodness, in accordance with the laws, be they divine, canonical, or civil. If a man may undergo temporal punishment for the temporal benefit of others, why should he not be punished temporally and eternally for the temporal and eternal benefit of the elect, in order that they might all the more flee from evil and choose the good in the present, that in the future they might have greater joy, deeper love, and higher praise for God?

Thus great profit, both in the present and in the future, accrues to the elect from the reprobate, indeed the whole purpose of being for the reprobate is that they have been created for the

sake of the elect. What injustice and cruelty can be charged to God because he chooses to predestine and create one of his creatures for the service of another creature and both of them for his own service, praise, glory, and honor? This is particularly true, since he punishes no man with eternal damnation unless such a man deserves it, that is to say, unless through his sins he deservedly and justly requires eternal punishment. And God always punishes most mercifully and appropriately because innumerable times he finds a way to punish less than is deserved.

If indeed, as Augustine seems to say, it is more desirable to be wretched than not to exist at all, what injustice or cruelty can be ascribed to God if he gives to some creature many and great goods, even though he may punish him with other of his creaturely goods, such as physical pain? When all is taken into account, this creature's position is more attractive than repulsive, and, therefore, even for this state he owes God thanks as for a great gift.

Why do they not accuse God because he punishes innocent beasts and baptized infants with no small physical pain? Indeed he gave up his own most innocent Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to a most painful, cruel, and tormenting punishment. But since God is omnipotent, completely free Lord of his whole creation, whose will alone is the most righteous law for all creation—if he should eternally punish the innocent, particularly since he does it for the perfection of the universe, for the profit of others, and for the honor of God himself, who would presume to dispute with him, to contradict him, or ask, "Why do you do this?" I firmly believe, no one! "Has the potter no right over the clay to make of the same lump one vessel for honor and another for menial use?"

From Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 151–62.

11. Gabriel Biel, *The Circumcision of the Lord* (ca. 1460)

Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), a representative of the nominalist theological school, lectured and wrote at the University of Tübingen. Like Bradwardine, he addressed the question of justification; but unlike Bradwardine, he took a position that was, while not crudely Pelagian, subtly at odds with Augustinianism. In fact, his views have frequently been described as “semi-Pelagian.” In this sermon, intended for a university audience, Biel summarizes his theology of justification—one which the young Luther studied assiduously.

“His name shall be called Jesus” (Luke 2:21).

A few days ago we celebrated that glorious day which the birth of our Savior has made so wonderful and lovely for us and which he gave us as an example for our imitation. To this rejoicing is now added a new exultation when today in the circumcision of the newborn king “that name” is given “which is above every name,” which was chosen by the Father from eternity before all worlds, which was enunciated by angels, by the mother and by Joseph, the legal father, which was according to Origen announced to them by the new man.

On this day of his circumcision we have no less reason for wonder, praise, and imitation than on the day of his birth. On that day we marveled that the highest majesty appeared in the form of a servant. Today we marvel that this God who is born sinlessly, true God from God the Father and true man from the Virgin Mary, was circumcised just like a sinner.

On Christmas Day we, in our small way, gave thanks, expressing our love and praise for the redeemer who came into the prison of this world to lead the captives out of this prison. Today we magnify him with all our hearts because he put on our fetters and bonds and

because he put his own innocent hands into our chains in order that we criminals might be set free.

At his birth we saw with the shepherds the Word which was abbreviated to fit the dimensions of the world; we saw lying in the manger the holy and tender child whose humility we are urged to imitate. Today we see that he who gave the law made himself subject to the law by his circumcision and thus we are instructed even more clearly in obedience of the law to which we are subject. And just as on that day at the moment of his birth, or beginning, he joined together the human with the divine, now at his circumcision he shows that he is truly man, while simultaneously “that name which is above every name” bespeaks the glory of majesty. In order that his divine nature by which he saves his people from their sins might be better known, he has, by his circumcision, destroyed sin in the children of wrath and infused his grace in them. Therefore, it is most appropriate that the text, “His name shall be called Jesus,” is selected at the beginning as our theme. Pray now for the needed assistance of grace with a “Hail Mary”!

“Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given”: that is Jesus.

He is called Savior. Not just through human preaching but through the message of the angels it is already well enough known to Christians that the Child who has been born and the Son who has been given to us is called Jesus, that is, Savior. Savior, not because of some limited and temporal salvation, as some men have sometimes been called “savior,” but Savior because of that universal, spiritual, and eternal salvation which no one else has bestowed or has ever been able to bestow.

To resume, Gabriel said to Joseph, “You will call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.” In truth he *has already saved*

his people by preparing medicine. *He continues to save* them daily by driving out disease. *He will save* them ultimately by giving them perfect health and preserving them from every ill. The preparation of the medicine is the task of the human nature of Christ, the driving out of disease the task of the divine nature, and the perfect health the task of both natures.

He prepared the medicine when he instituted and commanded the medicinal sacraments. To heal the wounds inflicted by our sins, he, through the effusion of his blood, earned efficacy for the sacraments. Since I remember having preached about this at length a year ago on this very day, I comment no further on this point and turn to another. In the present sermon three issues are to be raised.

First, in what does this driving out of disease consist? How does this accord with Christ's divine nature? *Second*, what is actually accomplished by grace? We ought to see what grace is and what its effects are. *Third*, some truths should be deduced regarding the significance of grace by which we can be exhorted to come to know and to praise the power of God.

I said that our Savior saves us daily by driving out disease, which is the task of his divine nature. Now it is obvious that this disease is sin, which he drives out when he forgives and ceases to impute to the sinner eternal punishment. As the prophet says, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin, whose sin is covered." And Jerome, commenting on that said, "When the Lord forgives sins he covers the sinner lest in the judgment it be revealed to his damnation." For, as Augustine said, when God sees sins he charges them unto punishment. But when he forgives sins he also always restores the lost grace which is the health and life of the soul. Since, now, "all the works of God are perfect," he does not imperfectly heal the disease by merely driving it out,

but he also gives health by the infusion of grace. For a man does not enjoy perfect health when, although without pain in his body, he is unable to use it for the tasks of life. But this capacity is a gift of grace. This is what Augustine meant when he said, "The Lamb takes away the sins both by forgiving what has been done and by helping the sinner not to sin again." This help is extended through grace.

Both operations are ascribed primarily to the divine nature. No one removes sins except God alone, who is the Lamb taking away the sins of the world, as Augustine said. For this reason, namely, that he forgives sins, the Jews accused Christ of blasphemy, since they did not believe him to be God. Now no one confers grace except God. It is clear that grace comes into being only through God's creative action, since grace cannot be acquired through our works like other moral habits which, as Aristotle said, are naturally engendered in us by repetition of our own moral actions. The apostle Paul said, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace." Because nature cannot make something out of nothing, that which is created comes from God alone. If grace could come from the creature, a grace which would suffice unto salvation, then any creature would be able to save himself by his own natural powers, that is, do what only grace can do. That is the error of Pelagius. Therefore the prophet said, "The Lord will give grace and glory."

In order that we understand with what great kindness God saves us by his justification of sinners or the forgiveness of sins (and thus understand the mercy of the Lord), let us be found even more acceptable to him and let us in gratitude prepare for the reception of even greater gifts.

Now we must see just what this grace is by which the sinner is justified and what is actu-

ally accomplished in us. The grace of which we speak is a gift of God supernaturally infused into the soul. It makes the soul acceptable to God and sets it on the path to deeds of meritorious love.

There are many other supernatural gifts that are also infused into the soul. The apostle Paul says, "There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit," and goes on to enumerate gifts of the Spirit—wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, etc. "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge, etc." But none of them make the man who receives them acceptable to God, nor does it make his work worthy of merit.

Now the many praiseworthy effects of grace can be summarized under three headings: (a) making acceptable, (b) justifying, and (c) making the works which result meritorious and worthy of eternal life, of grace and glory.

(a) Grace makes acceptable for this reason alone, that it is present in and is part of that nature which can be beatified, that is, man. According to Scotus, grace is an enrichment of nature that is pleasing to God's will. Grace makes human nature acceptable to God by adorning it not with an ordinary acceptance but with that special acceptance by which man is according to God's decision ordained toward life eternal. For to be acceptable, to be beloved by God and to be his friend, means to be in such a state that one will attain eternal life unless one loses this state through sin. For example, in just this way, grace makes acceptable to God children who neither desire nor are able to desire the good. This is what the apostle Paul said to Timothy, "So that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs to a firm hope of eternal life." And Peter said, "Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we believe unto salvation."

(b) And because grace makes the sinner acceptable to God it follows that it also justifies him. Justification has two aspects: remission of guilt, and acceptance to eternal life, since it is impossible for one who is going to be accepted to eternal life to be at the same time condemned to eternal punishment. If it were otherwise, the same person would be both worthy and unworthy of eternal life. Therefore, it is necessary that he who has been accepted unto life have his guilt forgiven (if he has any).

But if grace is infused into someone who is already justified, that which it accomplishes is not justification. An example would be the grace once given to the holy angels and now daily given to those who are upright of heart, who through their good works earn an additional gift of grace above and beyond the grace already in them. About this justification by grace Paul writes, "They are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

(c) Thus God makes these our works meritorious and acceptable for eternal reward, not actually all our works but only those which have been brought forth by the prompting of grace. It is assumed of a meritorious work that the person who performs it is accepted, since the acts of a person who has not been accepted or of an enemy cannot please God. As Genesis says, "The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering," that is, God's acceptance went first to the person of Abel and only secondly to his gifts. And this acceptance is due to the mere presence of grace in a person, as we saw above.

But an act is not meritorious just because it is performed by one who has been accepted, since such a person can commit venial sins or perform morally indifferent [neutral] acts. Therefore, a meritorious act must be brought forth by the prompting of grace. This grace prompts us to love God above all things and in

all things, that is, to seek after the glory of God as the goal of every action, and to prefer the ultimate good, God, ahead of one's self and everything else. Therefore, all those things which are not directed consciously or unconsciously toward God do not come from the prompting of grace and therefore are surely not worthy of eternal life.

And although, according to some doctors, man can love God above everything else with his natural powers alone [without grace], this applied particularly to man before the fall; but man can never love God as perfectly and easily as with grace. Moreover, without grace it is absolutely impossible for him to love God meritoriously. Such is the rule established by God that no act should be accepted as meritorious unless it be prompted by grace. Therefore, the apostle said, "We are not sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, our sufficiency is from God." And again after having said that he had worked hard for others, the apostle quickly added, "Though it was not I, but the grace of God which is within me."

Thus, as Lombard said, meritorious acts depend on two factors, our free will and grace. There is no human merit that does not depend partly on free will. The principal cause of meritorious moral action, however, is attributed to grace. But grace does not determine the will. The will can ignore the prompting of grace and lose it by its own default. The prompting of grace is toward meritorious acts for the sake of God. Therefore, the act as such stems primarily from grace. This is the case because it is performed by someone who has grace in accordance with the prompting of grace. Augustine speaks in this way when he says that the will is related to grace like a footservant to her lady—it accompanies but does not precede grace. And in his book on free will he says that grace is related to free will as a rider to the horse. The

rider guides the horse and chooses the direction in which to go. Indeed it is in this way that grace steers and prompts the will to direct itself toward God.

Thus it is clear that grace is nothing other than infused love [charity], because the same effects are attributed to both. For love [charity] is that which prompts us to love God above everything else, which makes us beloved to God, without which no one is beatified. Now this is exactly what grace does; therefore both Holy Scripture and the Fathers identify love with grace. What love accomplishes they attribute to grace alone and vice versa. So the apostle says that no gifts are of benefit without love. And again the apostle reported that the Lord had spoken to him, "My grace is sufficient for you." Now these two assertions are consistent only if love and grace are exactly the same.

Augustine, too, says, "The whole difference between salvation and perdition is grace alone," and elsewhere: "It is love alone that makes the difference between salvation and perdition." This thesis rests not only on authorities but also on reason based on Scripture, for if grace and love were different they could be separated by God. Then it would be possible for a man to have grace but not be a friend of God, or man could even be an enemy of God, if he had grace and not love, or, again, man could be a friend of God but not accepted by God, if he had love but not grace. Therefore, we conclude that it is one and the same to be accepted, beloved, and a friend of God.

Scotus, however, argues for a rational distinction between the two. Grace, he says, refers to God as the loving subject, on the grounds that the word "grace" is used when God loves someone. Love [charity] on the other hand refers to God as the object of love, because this word has the connotation of love for God.

Likewise it is clear why the doctors call grace a habit, although it is not acquired but infused. Grace accomplishes in the soul something similar to the effects of a naturally acquired habit, although in a far more perfect fashion than an acquired habit. The naturally acquired habit is a permanent quality in the power of the soul which stems from frequently repeated acts. This habit prompts and urges the man to repeat the same act. As Aristotle says, "Experience teaches us with certainty that all these acts leave behind a capacity which allows us to do these acts with greater care, readiness, pleasure, and correctness."

But grace elevates human power beyond itself, so that acts which had been turned by sin toward evil or inward toward one's self now can be meritoriously redirected against the law of the flesh and toward God. Grace leads, assists, and directs in order that man may be prompted in a way which corresponds with divine charity. And thus grace weakens the remaining power of sin, not—as many doctors say—because it forgives or wipes out sins, but because it strengthens human power.

We could use the illustration of a bird that has a stone tied to it so that it could scarcely fly away. Now if this bird's wings were strengthened, then we would say that the impediment to flight had been lessened, although the weight of the stone had not been lessened. Thus the apostle knew that he was assisted by grace when he cried out against the law of the flesh by which he was tortured, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The preceding has made clear how much the grace given to us by Christ excels the original righteousness we lost in Adam. Because, although original righteousness completely subdued the tincture of sin and ordered the

lower powers of man in perfect obedience to the higher powers, it did not give to human power the capacity to perform meritorious works. Nor could Adam have been saved by original righteousness alone without grace. From this we can understand how great a gift that grace is by which Christ saves in the present dispensation. Grace is a gift above every created thing, as the apostle makes clear. Referring to this, the Lord said to the disciples, "No longer shall I call you servants but friends." Augustine says, "Behold the gifts given to the church, and know that from among them all, the most excellent is the gift of love." Grace is "the gift by which alone we are made good, as by no other created gifts." Whatever you want, have this. This is the only gift which is indispensable, without which all the others are useless. "Even if you do not have the others, knowledge or prophecy, having this you have fulfilled the law." Not only is this gift more glorious than all others, it is so great that it is never given unless the Holy Trinity gives itself with it. The Trinity never gives itself without this gift nor the gift without itself. As the apostle has said, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." And the Gospel of John asserts that the Holy Spirit is not given without the Father and the Son.

In all these things, my beloved, magnify and praise the loving mercy and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ which is shown in the justification of the sinner. He could very well have forgiven sins by abstaining from punishment for them, without going so far as embracing the sinner as a friend—for this is all that man usually does. But God thought it too little to forgive the sins of him who had lost God's friendship through sinning, without also restoring (*reformaret*) him to his personal friendship.

But even this does not exhaust the infinite mercy of the Savior; he also gives a special aid of grace. By this grace we are able to remain without difficulty in his friendship, and to grow continually through good works. On such a foundation we can easily overcome the onslaughts of the devil, the world, and flesh, and gain a great reward in store for us.

No doubt he could have simultaneously made us his friends and accepted our work as meritorious without this gift of grace. But how could we have remained in friendship with God without the assistance of grace? Thus God has established the rule [covenant] that whoever turns to him and does what he can will receive forgiveness of sins from God. God infuses assisting grace into such a man, who is thus taken back into friendship. As is written in John: "Grace and truth came through Christ."

So that this might be more easily understood, I shall tell a parable: Let us say that there is a most lenient king who shows so much mercy to his people that he publishes a decree saying that he will embrace with his favor any of his enemies who desire his friendship, provided they mend their ways for the present and the future. Furthermore, the king orders that all who have been received in this fashion into his friendship will receive a golden ring to honor all who are dedicated to his regime, so that such a friend of the king may be known to all. The king gives to such a man by way of delegation of his royal authority such a position that every work done to the honor of the king, regardless of where performed or how large or small it is, shall be rewarded by the king above and beyond its value. And to give him extra strength to perform this kind of meritorious work, precious and powerful stones are inserted in the ring to encourage him who wears it, so that his body does not fail him when he needs it but increases in ability to gain further rewards

the more the body is exercised and accustomed to resist every adverse force.

How could one ever praise highly enough the clemency and the preciousness of the gifts of such a king? Behold, such is our King and Savior! The gift is grace, which is bestowed abundantly on us, which is to the soul what the ring is to the body in the parable.

Therefore, it is indeed fitting that the name of such a great Savior be Jesus, because he alone can save his people by his gift of grace. We pray that he deign to give us this grace in the present and glory in the future. Amen.

From Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 165–74.



Indulgences

Indulgences were an integral part of the religious landscape on the eve of the Reformation. The theory behind them was given official status in Pope Clement VI's bull *Unigenitus* in 1343. In 1476 Pope Sixtus IV, in his bull *Salvator noster*, first applied indulgences to the souls in purgatory. Thus, by the sixteenth century, the machinery of indulgences was well-established and their sale was commonplace. We can see just how the system functioned from Archbishop Albert of Mainz's instructions to his indulgence sales staff in 1515.

12. Clement VI, *Unigenitus* (1343)

The only-begotten Son of God deigned to come down from his father's bosom into the womb of his mother, in whom and from whom he joined, by an ineffable union, the substance of our mortality to his divinity, in unity of person. . . . His purpose was in this way to redeem fallen human-

ity and make satisfaction for him to God the Father. . . . Nor did he redeem us with corruptible things—with silver and gold but with his own precious blood, which he is known to have poured out as an innocent victim on the altar of the cross: not a mere measured drop of blood (which however because of its union with the Word would have sufficed for the redemption of all humanity) but as it were an unmeasured flood. . . . What a great treasure, then, did the holy Father acquire therefrom for the church militant, lest the mercy of so great an outpouring be made empty, useless or superfluous! . . . Those who avail themselves of this infinite treasure are given a share in God's friendship [*Wisdom*, 8:14].

Now this treasure he entrusted to be dispensed for the weal of the faithful . . . through blessed Peter, who bore the keys of heaven, and Peter's successors as God's own representatives on earth. The purposes served should be proper and reasonable: sometimes total, sometimes partial remission of punishment due for temporal sins, as well generally as specially (according as they learn it to be expedient with God); and for these ends the treasure should be applied in mercy to those who are truly penitent and have made their confession.

The mass of this treasure is known to have been increased by the merits of the blessed mother of God and of all the elect, from the first righteous man to the last. Nor is there any fear of its being used up or diminished, as well because of the infinite merits of Christ . . . as because the greater the number who are drawn to righteousness by its application, the greater grows the mass of merits themselves.

13. Sixtus IV, *Salvator noster* (1476)

Our aim is that the salvation of souls may be secured above all at that time when they most

need the intercessions of others and are least able to help themselves. We wish by our apostolic authority to draw on the treasury of the church and to succor the souls in purgatory who died united with Christ through love and whose lives have merited that such intercessions should now be offered through an indulgence of this kind.

With the longings of such great paternal affection as with God's help we can achieve, in reliance on the divine mercy and the plenitude of our power, we grant by concession an indulgence as follows: If any parents, friends or other Christians are moved by obligations of piety towards these very souls who are exposed to the fire of purgatory for the expiation of punishments which by divine justice are their due, let them during the stated period of ten years give a fixed amount or value of money, as laid down by its dean and chapter or by our own collector, for the repair of the church of saints, paying either in person at the Church or by duly accredited messengers: it is then our will that plenary remission should avail by intercession for the said souls in purgatory, to win them relief from their punishments—the souls, that is, for whose sakes the stated quantity or value of money has been paid in the manner declared.

14. Albert of Mainz, *Instructio summaria* (1515)

The following are the four principal gifts of grace that have been granted by the apostolic bull: any one of them can be had separately. It is on these four indulgences that the preachers must concentrate their utmost diligence, infiltrating them one by one into the ears of the faithful in the most effective way, and explaining them with all the ability they have.

The first principal grace is the plenary remission of all sins—the greatest of all graces,

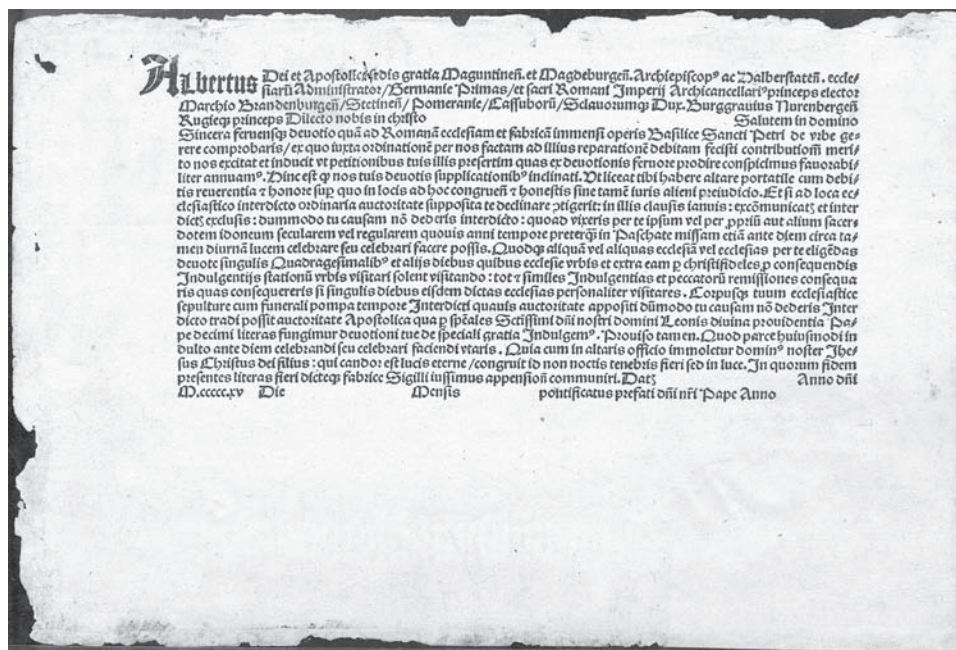


FIGURE 1.4 Unused indulgence from 1515. Photo courtesy of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

for the reason that man, a sinner who is deprived of divine grace, obtains through it perfect remission and God's grace anew. In addition, through this remission of sins, punishments to be undergone in purgatory because of offense done to the divine majesty, are remitted in full, and the punishments of the said purgatory are totally wiped out. Now it is true that no possible repayment could be sufficient to earn so great a grace, for the reason that God's gift and his grace are beyond valuation; nevertheless, that the invitation of Christians to secure it may be made easier, we lay down the following procedure:

First, let every penitent who has made oral confession visit at least seven of the churches appointed for this purpose—that is, those in which the papal arms are installed—and in each church let him say with devotion five

Paternosters and five Ave Marias to render honor to the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom has been enacted our redemption. . . .

For those who are confined to their beds there may be deputed a dedicated image before which or to which they may say certain prayers according to the ruling of the penitentiary. . . .

If anyone for any reason seeks to be excused the visit to the said churches or altars, the penitentiaries, having heard the reason, may allow it: such a visit may be compounded by a larger financial contribution.

This money must be placed in a box. But the contributions for the repository in aid of the construction of the building of the chief of the apostles will be sought as follows: first the penitentiaries and confessors, after expounding the magnitude of such plenary remission and

indulgences to those who confess, will ask them how much in money or other temporal possessions their consciences tell them it is worth to make good the lack of such plenary remission and indulgences; they will ask this to facilitate their subsequent inducements to contribute. And since human conditions vary far too much for us to take separate account of them all and lay an appropriate assessment on each, we classify them in general terms and assess the classes as follows. . . . [Albert then assesses at fixed amounts all classes from kings and archbishops down through abbots and barons to priests and merchants and the lesser orders of society concluding with] the penniless, who may make good their contribution by prayers and fasting: for the kingdom of heaven should not stand open for the rich more than for the poor. . . .

The second principal grace is the confessional, carrying with it the greatest, most relevant and previously unknown indulgences. . . . Its contents and their significance the preachers and confessors must explain and extol with all their power. In the confessional the following concessions are made for those who pay for it:

The right to choose as a suitable confessor even a regular of a mendicant order who can in the first place absolve them from having to seek a settlement of complaints that other men can bring against them.

He can absolve them once in the course of their lives and also in *articulo mortis* from certain of the gravest sins, even those which are reserved for the apostolic see. He can absolve them from cases not reserved for the apostolic see as often as is necessary.

He can apply plenary indulgence of all sins once in the course of the confessing person's life and in *articulo mortis* as often as death threatens, even if the threat does not materialize.

He can commute any kind of vows for other works of piety, except solemn vows undertaken

overseas or of a pilgrimage to the thresholds of the apostles (and of St. James in Compostela) or of the religious life and of chastity.

He can administer the sacrament of the Eucharist at any time of the year except Easter day and *in articulo mortis*.

We order that one of these confessionals must be made generally available to ensure that the poor are not excluded from the graces it contains, . . . the reckoning being a quarter of a golden Rhenish florin which (quite apart from the usual assessment) must be placed in the indulgence-repository. . . .

The third principal grace is participation in all the blessings of the universal church. . . .

The fourth principal grace is the plenary remission of all sins for the souls that exist in purgatory, which the pope grants and concedes by means of intercessions, so that a contribution placed by the living in the repository on their behalf counts as one which a man might make or give for himself. . . . There is no need for the contributors to be of contrite heart or to make oral confession, since this grace depends (as the bull makes clear) on the love in which the departed died and the contributions which the living pay.

From E. G. Rupp and B. Drewery, eds., *Martin Luther* (London: Edward Arnold; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 13–17.



Eating, Sleeping, and Dying

15. Dietrich Kolde, *Mirror for Christians* (1470)

Dietrich Kolde (d. 1515) was first an Augustinian and then a Franciscan priest who served various constituencies in German-speaking lands and the Low Countries. His catechism was written in German for the

instruction of uneducated laypeople, and after its first printing in 1470 it went on to become one of the most popular of these pedagogical tools. In it he rehearses and explains the traditional matter of catechesis—the creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. And along the way he inserts practical advice about how Christians should conduct themselves in the most mundane events of ordinary life. He also adds a section on how to die, a major theme in late medieval devotional literature.

A Lesson about How a Person Should Conduct Himself at Meals

When you are about to sit down to eat and drink at the table, you should bless God first with an Our Father or two, and make the sign of the cross over the meal and say: Bless us and these gifts that we will receive by your generosity through Jesus Christ your dear Son. Amen. May God allow us to partake at the heavenly table. God is love. Whoever remains in love, remains in God, and God remains in him. May his love bless us and lead us to eternal life. Amen.

You should speak of God during the meal, because God’s angels are standing at your table and at your door. Further, you should eat and drink in moderation. Further, you should not eat your fill, even though you would like more, since otherwise you would be acting like the beasts that stuff themselves until they can eat no more. You should think thus during the meal: O dear Lord, how many holy people there are who scarcely have bread to eat, and they thank you much more than I! O dear Lord, our ancestors in the wilderness did not live so luxuriously with food and drink as we do now. But nevertheless we would like to be in heaven. O dear Lord, please console and nourish all the souls in purgatory. Amen.

After the meal you should get up and say an Our Father and thank him for his gifts, and then say this as well: O dear Lord, give favor and grace to the living. Give eternal rest to the dead. To holy Christendom give peace, and give us poor sinners eternal life after this life. Amen.

How a Person Should Conduct Himself When He Goes to Bed

In the evening, when you go to bed, you should kneel down in front of your bed, and if you wish you can stretch out your arms like a cross, as Christ did on the cross, and raise your eyes to heaven and say: O dear Lord, almighty God, I am a poor sinful person. I am guilty of not serving you fervently today; and of not saying my prayers with fervor; and of passing many hours, nearly all the time, idly; and of neglecting to do many good works. Further, here you should say what sins you committed that day, and cry out and ask God the Lord for compassion and grace and forgiveness for your sins, and resolve firmly to go to confession and to commit the sins no more. And if you were to die that night with such a resolution, you would never be damned. Further, you should thank our dear Lord and Mary his dear mother for the bitter suffering and the pain that Mary endured at the time of Vespers when she saw her dear child taken from the cross and laid on her virgin bosom; further, for how he was buried at the time of Compline and Mary, the blessed mother of our dear Lord, had to go away so bitterly grieving and weeping; and for how she came again to Jerusalem with bloody clothes; and how the women of Jerusalem stood before the entrance and said: O Lord God, how can the dear mother be so sadly troubled; oh what state the holy maternal heart must be in; oh the poor woman, what pain she has endured as she lost such a sweet dear child; and they said to her: O



FIGURE 1.5 Deathbed struggle. *The Art of Good Lywyng and Good Deyng*, 1503.

Mary, why are your clothes so bloody? You should weep when you think of this, and ask Mary on your behalf to ask her dear child for forgiveness of your sins, and for solace and rest for the poor souls in purgatory. And in this state of great fervor you should go to bed and think how the great lords of this world and many rich people who have lived and died in sins are now burning in hell, where they will never again rest or sleep. And because you know this, you should sleep sweetly and think about resting with St. John the Evangelist at the breast of Jesus. Oh how sweetly you will sleep, and how happily you will awake in the morning, and how happy you will be all day. If you awake in the night, you should say: O dear Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me and give rest to the souls in purgatory, because they are in great pain.

How One Should Die, and This Is the Most Fruitful Lesson in the World

First of all, a person should say his creed repeatedly in German and with devotion; and if he cannot say the creed himself, he should have it spoken before him by another person. And he should always say: O dear Lord, I believe all that a good Christian is obliged to believe, and I desire to live and die in the faith. And if anything else occurs to me that is contrary to this creed I renounce it now for then and then for now. O dear Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen me in this holy faith. O dear Lord, even though I have sinned much and confessed badly and improved badly, I still do not want to despair of you, because you are so very compassionate; I have become so bitterly sour toward you and you have suffered so much for me. And you also said: Anyone who comes to your vineyard at the time of Vespers should receive payment equal to those who worked the whole day. O dear Lord, I come to my conversion late. Have

mercy on me. You can speak a word and forgive me all my sins. O dear Lord, what would you gain if I should lie a long time in purgatory, a fate which I surely deserve? O dear Lord, you said: Ask and it will be given to you. I ask you, Lord, just say a word and make my soul healthy. O dear Lord, please be mindful that the dead will not praise you nor all those who are in hell. O dear Lord, I will gladly endure everything that you send to me for my sins. O dear Lord, please let this small suffering, and your great and manifold suffering, stand for all my sins.

Further, one should say the following prayers repeatedly to sick people:

O dear Lord Jesus Christ, you untied the bonds of all my sins with your holy suffering. Therefore, dear Lord, I want to offer you an offering of praise, namely, my poor soul, which I offer into your hands. Now I will die patiently and willingly if that is your dearest will. O dear Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry from the bottom of my heart that I have angered you. O dear Lord God, I wish I were a thousand times more sorry. I wish I could cry tears of blood for my sins. Oh, dear Lord, accept my good intentions in place of works. O dear Lord, I give you my body and my soul. Do with me as your holy will dictates, and not as my earthly nature wills. The spirit is prepared but the flesh is weak: O dear Lord Jesus Christ, please do not reject me, a poor sinner.

Further, when it gets to the point of separation, or when bitter death is coming, then you should say the following repeatedly:

O dear Lord Jesus Christ, father and mother have left me. I ask you, dear Lord, to receive me now into your kingdom.

O holy God! O powerful God! O compassionate God! O strict and righteous judge, have mercy on me, a poor sinner, when I must answer at your terrifyingly strict court, and when I am to give testimony as a poor human being about

all my words and all my deeds. O dear Lord Jesus, then may your holy bitter death, your precious blood and your unspeakable manifold suffering stand between you and all my sins.

O dear Lord Jesus, I am the poor human being that you yourself created in your own image with your divine strength and power. O dear Lord, I am the poor human being that you yourself redeemed and delivered from all strength and power of the devil with your innocent bitter death.

O dearest Lord Jesus Christ, I am the poor human being that you can preserve with your unfathomable compassion. Stand by me in my hour of death, when all the world departs from me.

O Father, into your hands I commit my spirit, because you have redeemed me, O my God of truth.

O Mary, mother of grace and mother of compassion, shelter and protect me from the devils and receive my poor soul in my hour of death. O gentle advocate and guiding star, please do not depart from me. O esteemed sweet Virgin Mary, let me see your chosen pure child rejoicing now. O dear Mary, let me hear the voices of the angels. Go out, O beautiful bride of Christ, you noble soul! Jesus, your bridegroom, is coming! O Mary, let me never hear the voice of Jesus the strict judge. O gentle, compassionate and sweet Mary, stand by me now, because today I must fight a battle on which my poor soul's eternal bliss or eternal damnation depends. O Mary, mother of God, and all God's dear saints, stand by me and help me fight, for if you do not help me my battle is lost. O dear, most sweet, gentle, compassionate maid Mary, have mercy on me, a poor, sorrowful, sinful human, because you are my mother and my only comfort, my hope and my confidence. Further, it is very useful and good to read with fervor the passion of our Lord for the

sick person, and the Our Father in German and the creed in German.

From D. Janz, ed., *Three Reformation Catechisms: Catholic, Anabaptist, Lutheran*. (Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), 101–2, 104–5, 121–24.



Criticism

16. Desiderius Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly* (1509)

Late medieval religion was not without its critics, ranging from harmless cranks and troublemakers, to fire and brimstone preachers of the impending apocalypse, to sophisticated and subtle thinkers gently prodding the church in the direction of reform. At one extreme we have the illiterate peasant in the remote village of Montailu who opined that Mary was certainly not a virgin. And on the other, we have a figure like Desiderius Erasmus (d. 1536), standing at the pinnacle of culture and learning. In his 1509 book *In Praise of Folly*, Erasmus launched a scathing attack on the manifold stupidities and blatant immoralities of the religious establishment. The fact that he remained to the end of his life a loyal son of the Roman Catholic Church shows that critical thought did not necessarily have to move in the Protestant direction.

As for the theologians, perhaps it would be better to pass them over in silence, “not stirring up the hornets’ nest” and “not laying a finger on the stinkweed,” since this race of men is incredibly arrogant and touchy. For they might rise up en masse and march in ranks against me with six hundred conclusions and force me to recant. And if I should refuse, they would immediately shout “heretic.” For this is

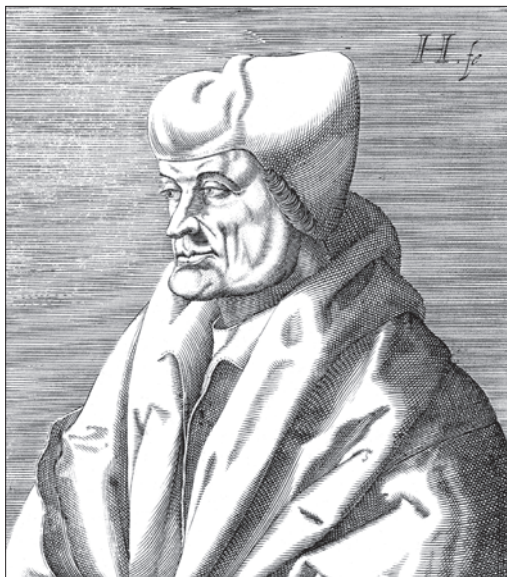


FIGURE 1.6 Erasmus of Rotterdam, from *Verheiden Effigies* by Jacob Verheiden, 1602. Photo courtesy of the Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

the thunderbolt they always keep ready at a moment's notice to terrify anyone to whom they are not very favorably inclined.

Certainly, though no one is less willing than they are to recognize my goodwill toward them, still these men are also obliged to me for benefits of no little importance. They are so blessed by their self-love as to be fully persuaded that they themselves dwell in the third heaven, looking down from high above on all other mortals as if they were earth-creeping vermin almost worthy of their pity. They are so closely hedged in by rows of magistral definitions, conclusions, corollaries, explicit and implicit propositions, they have so many "holes they can run to," that Vulcan himself couldn't net them tightly enough to keep them from escaping by means of distinctions, with which they cut all knots as cleanly as the fine-honed edge of "the headsman's axe"—so many new terms have they thought up and such monstrous jargon have they coined. Moreover, they

explicate sacred mysteries just as arbitrarily as they please, explaining by what method the world was established and arranged, by what channels original sin is transmitted to Adam's posterity, by what means, by what proportion, in how short a period of time Christ was fully formed in the virgin's womb, how accidents subsist in the Eucharist without any domicile. But such questions are run-of-the-mill. There are others which they think worthy of great and "illuminated" theologians, as they say. If they ever encounter these, then they really perk up. Whether there is any instant in the generation of the divine persons? Whether there is more than one filial relationship in Christ? Whether the following proposition is possible: God the Father hates the Son. Whether God could have taken on the nature of a woman, of the devil, of an ass, of a cucumber, of a piece of flint? And then how the cucumber would have preached, performed miracles, and been nailed to the cross? And what Peter would have consecrated (if he had consecrated) during the time Christ was hanging on the cross? And whether during that same time Christ could be called a man? And whether it will be permissible to eat and drink after the resurrection?—taking precautions even now against hunger and thirst.

There are numberless petty quibbles even more fine-spun than these, concerning notions, relations, instants, formalities, quiddities, eccities—things to which no eyesight could ever penetrate, unless it were an "x-ray vision" so powerful it could perceive through the deepest darkness things that are nowhere. Also throw in those *sententiae* of theirs, so paradoxical that those oracular sayings which the Stoics called paradoxes seem downright crude and commonplace by comparison—such as this, for example: it is a less serious crime to murder a thousand men than to fix just one shoe for a poor man on the Lord's day; or it would be better to let the

whole world be destroyed—"lock, stock, and barrel," as they say—than to tell just one, tiny, little white lie. And then these most subtle subtleties are rendered even subtler by the various "ways" or types of scholastic theology, so that you could work your way out of a labyrinth sooner than out of the intricacies of the Realists, Nominalists, Thomists, Albertists, Occamists, Scotists—and I still haven't mentioned all the sects, but only the main ones.

In all of these there is so much erudition, so much difficulty, that I think the apostles themselves would need to be inspired by a different spirit if they were forced to match wits on such points with this new breed of theologians. Paul could provide a living example of faith, but when he said "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for and the evidence of things not seen," his definition was not sufficiently magisterial. So too, he lived a life of perfect charity, but he neither distinguished it nor defined it with sufficient dialectical precision in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 13.

Certainly the apostles consecrated the Eucharist very piously, but still if they had been asked about the "terminus a quo" and the "terminus ad quem," about transubstantiation, about how the same body can be in different places, about the difference between the body of Christ as it is in heaven, as it was on the cross, and as it is in the Eucharist, about the exact point at which transubstantiation takes place (since the speech through which it is accomplished is a divisible quantity which takes place in a flowing period of time), I don't think they would have responded with a subtlety equal to that of the Scotists when they discuss and define these points. They knew Jesus' mother, but which of them has shown how she was preserved from the stain of Adam's sin as philosophically as our theologians have done it? Peter received the keys, and received

them from one who would not have committed them to someone unworthy of them, but still I don't know whether he understood—certainly he never attained sufficient subtlety to understand—how even a person who does not have knowledge can still have the keys of knowledge. They baptized everywhere, but nowhere did they teach what are the formal, material, efficient, and final causes of baptism, nor do they even so much as mention the delible and indelible marks of the sacraments. Certainly they worshiped God, but they did so in the spirit, following no other directive than the one given in the gospel: "God is a spirit and those who worship him should worship him in the spirit and in truth." But it is hardly clear that it was also revealed to them that a charcoal sketch drawn on a wall should be worshiped with the same worship as Christ himself, provided that the picture has two fingers extended, long hair, and three rays in the halo stuck on the back of the skull. For who could perceive these things unless he had spent thirty-six whole years in studying the physics and metaphysics of Aristotle and the Scotists? So too, the apostles preach grace very forcefully, but nowhere do they distinguish between grace "*gratis data*" and grace "*gratificans*." They exhort us to good works, without distinguishing "*opus operans*" from "*opus operatum*." Everywhere they inculcate charity, without separating infused from acquired charity or explaining whether charity is an accident or a substance, a created or an uncreated thing. They detest sin, but I would stake my life they couldn't define scientifically what it is that we call sin, unless perchance they had been instructed by the spirit of the Scotists. Nor can I bring myself to believe that Paul, from whose learning we may judge that of the others, would so often have condemned questions, disputes, genealogies, and (as he calls them) quarrels about words, if

he had been so expert in subtle argumentation, especially since all the quarrels and disputes of that time were coarse and crude by comparison with the supersubtleties of our doctors of theology.

But they are men of the greatest modesty: if the apostles have perhaps written something a bit loosely, without magisterial precision, far be it from them to condemn it; rather, they make the proper allowances in their interpretation, paying at least that much respect to the antiquity of Scripture on the one hand and to the title of apostle on the other. And Lord knows it would be a little unfair to demand from them things about which they never heard a single word from their teacher. But if the same thing happens in Chrysostom, Basil, or Jerome, then they consider it sufficient to write next to it "*non tenetur*" (untenable). These Fathers certainly did confute pagan philosophers and Jews, who are by temperament extraordinarily stubborn, but they did it by the lives they led and the miracles they performed rather than by manufacturing syllogisms. They also convinced people whose minds were completely incapable of following even a single quodlibet of Scotus. But nowadays what pagan, what heretic would not immediately yield to so many fine-spun subtleties, unless he should be too crude to follow them, or so impudent as to make fun of them, or provided with the same snares so that the two sides would be evenly matched, just as if you should match one magician against another or as if one man with a charmed sword should fight against another whose sword was also charmed. For then it would be like the loom of Penelope: weaving and unweaving the same piece of cloth over and over again. So far as I can judge, Christians would be wise if, instead of sending out those regiments of thick-skulled soldiers who have been fighting for so long now without winning

a decisive victory, they should send against the Turks and Saracens these most clamorous Scotists and most stubborn Occamists and invincible Albertists, together with the whole band of dialecticians: they would behold, I think, the finest battle imaginable and such a victory as was never seen before. For who could be so cold as not to be inflamed by their acumen? Who could be so dull as not to be stimulated by the sharpness of their wit? Who so sharp-sighted that they could not pull the wool over his eyes?

But I may seem to be saying all this merely as a joke. No wonder, indeed, since among the theologians themselves there are some better educated men who are disgusted by these theological quibbles, which they consider utterly pointless. There are those who denounce it as a form of sacrilege and consider it the worst sort of impiety to talk in such a tawdry fashion, to dispute with the worldly subtleties of the pagans, to lay down such arrogant definitions, about sacred mysteries which should be reverently contemplated rather than explicated, and to besmirch the majesty of divine theology with words and ideas so bloodless and even squalid.

But meanwhile they themselves are so completely contented and self-satisfied, they even applaud themselves so enthusiastically, that they spend their days and nights in these most delightful trifles and have not a moment to spare to read through the gospel or Paul's epistles even once. At the same time, while they are talking nonsense in the schools, they think they are supporting the universal church, which otherwise would collapse, with their syllogistic props in much the same way that Atlas, in the mythology of the poets, holds up the world on his shoulders. You can imagine how happy a life they lead while they distort and reshape Holy Scripture however they like (just as if it

were a lump of wax), while they demand that their conclusions (to which some schoolmen have subscribed) should be more revered than the laws of Solon and more binding than the papal decretals, while—like moral guardians of the whole world—they demand a recantation of whatever doesn't square "to a T" with their explicit and implicit conclusions, while they deliver their oracular pronouncements: "This proposition is scandalous," "This one is not sufficiently reverential," "This one gives off a whiff of heresy," "This one does not tinkle true," so that not even baptism, not the gospel, not Paul or Peter, not St. Jerome or St. Augustine, in fact not even Thomas himself *Aristotelicissimus*, can make someone a Christian unless he has the vote of these bachelors of divinity, so fine-honed is the edge of their judgment. Who would ever have thought that someone who said that the two parts of such paired expressions as "*matula putes*" and "*matula putet*" or "*ollae feruere*" and "*ollam feruere*" are equally congruent is no true Christian if these wise men had not taught us about it? Who would ever have delivered the church from the darkness of such grave errors—which, in fact, no one would ever have heard of if they had not read them in pronouncements issued with the great seals of the universities? But aren't they as happy as can be while they do such things? And also while they depict every detail of the infernal regions so exactly that you would think they had spent several years in that commonwealth. And also while they manufacture at their pleasure new heavenly spheres, finally adding the largest and most beautiful of all just to make sure that the blessed souls would have plenty of room to take walks, to stage their dinner parties, or even to play ball. With these trifles and thousands more like them their heads are so swollen and stuffed that I don't think Jupiter's brain was any more burdened when he called for Vulcan's

ax to give birth to Pallas. Therefore don't be surprised when you see them at public disputations with their heads so carefully wrapped up in swaths of cloth, for otherwise they would clearly explode.

Sometimes I myself have to laugh at them: they think they have finally reached the very acme of theology if they plumb the depths of barbarous and foul language; and when they mumble so badly that only another mumbler could understand them, they call it ingenuity beyond the reach of the ordinary listener. For they assert that it is not consonant with the dignity of sacred writing for them to be compelled to obey the rules of grammar. Wonderful indeed is the majesty of theologians if they alone have the right to speak faultily, though they have that in common with many lowly cobblers. Finally, they think they are most god-like whenever they are scrupulously addressed with the title "*Magister noster*," for they seem to find in that name something of the same mysterious profundity that the Jews revered in the ineffable four letters of Yahweh. Hence they say it is quite improper to write *magister noster* in anything but capital letters. But if anyone should say it backwards—"Noster magister"—at one stroke he has corrupted the entire majesty of the theological title.

Almost as happy as the theologians are those men who are commonly called "religious" and "monks"—though both names are quite incorrect, since a good part of them are very far removed from religion and no one is encountered more frequently everywhere you go. I cannot imagine how anything could be more wretched than these men, if it were not for the many sorts of assistance I give them. For even though everyone despises this breed of men so thoroughly that even a chance meeting with one of them is considered unlucky, still they maintain a splendid opinion of themselves.

First of all, they consider it the very height of piety to have so little to do with literature as not even to be able to read. Moreover, when they roar out their psalms in church like braying asses (counting their prayers indeed, but understanding them not at all), then (of all things!) they imagine that the listening saints are soothed and caressed with manifold delight. Among them are some who make a great thing out of their squalor and beggary, who stand at the door bawling out their demands for bread—indeed there is no inn or coach or ship where they do not make a disturbance, depriving other beggars of no small share of their income. And in this manner these most agreeable fellows, with their filth, ignorance, coarseness, and impudence, recreate for us, as they say, an image of the apostles.

But what could be more charming than to observe how they do everything by rules, as if they were entering figures in a ledger where it would be a terrible sin to overlook the smallest detail: how many knots to the shoe, what colors and different styles for each garment, of what material and how many straws wide the cincture may be, the cut of the hood and how many pecks it should hold, how many inches long the hair may be, how many hours are allowed for sleep. Who cannot see, considering the variety in physical and mental constitutions, how unequal this equality really is? Nevertheless, because of such trifles, not only do they consider outsiders beneath their contempt but one order scorns another, and men who profess apostolic charity raise a catastrophic uproar about a garment that is belted somewhat differently or a color that is a little darker. You can see some of them who are so strictly religious that their outer garments are of coarse goat's hair, but their undergarments are of fine silk; and then again you will see others who wear linen outside but lamb's wool underneath. Or

others who shrink from contact with money as if it were a deadly poison, but at the same time do not refrain from contact with wine and women. In short, they are all amazingly eager to avoid any agreement in their manner of life. Nor do they strive to be like Christ, but to be unlike each other. Then, too, a great part of their happiness consists in their titles: one order likes to be called Cordeliers, and among them some are Coletans, others Friars Minor, some Minims, others Bullists. Then some are Benedictines, others Bernardines; some are Brigetines, others Augustinians; some Williamites, others Jacobites—as if it weren't enough to be called Christians. The majority of them rely so much on their ceremonies and petty human traditions that they think one heaven is hardly a fitting reward for such merits, never quite realizing that Christ will scorn all such things and will require the fulfillment of his own precept, namely charity. One will display his barrel-belly, bloated with all kinds of fish. Another will pour out a hundred pecks of psalms. One will reckon up thousands of fasts and will claim that his belly has almost burst because he had only one lunch so often. Another will bring forth such a pile of ceremonies that seven freighters could hardly transport it. One will boast that for sixty years he never once touched money unless his fingers were protected by two pairs of gloves. Another will bring in a hood so filthy and greasy that no common seaman would consider it fit to put on. One will tell how for more than five and fifty years he led the life of a sponge, always fixed to one spot. Another will assert that his voice grew hoarse from continually singing, another that he became almost catatonic from solitude, another that his tongue atrophied from constant silence. But Christ, interrupting their boasts (which would otherwise never come to an end), will say, "Where did this new

race of Jews come from? The only law I recognize as truly mine is the only one I hear nothing about. Long ago, not speaking obliquely in parables but quite openly, I promised my Father's inheritance not to hoods, or trifling prayers, or fasts, but rather deeds of faith and charity. Nor do I acknowledge those who too readily acknowledge their own deeds: those who want to appear even holier than I am can go dwell in the heavens of the Abraxasians if they like, or they can order that a new heaven be built for them by the men whose petty traditions they have placed before my precepts." When they hear this and see sailors and teamsters chosen in preference to them, how do you suppose their faces will look as they stare at each other?

But meanwhile they are happy in their hopes, not without a helping hand from me. Then, too, though these men are cut off from political office, still no one dares to scorn them, especially the mendicants, because they have complete knowledge of everyone's secrets from what they call confession. Of course, they hold that it is wrong to reveal them, except every now and then when they are in their cups and want to amuse themselves with some funny stories, but then they make their point obliquely and hypothetically, without mentioning any names. But if anyone stirs up these hornets, they get their full measure of revenge in their sermons to the people, pointing out their enemy indirectly, so covertly that no one who understands anything at all can fail to understand who is meant. Nor will they ever make an end of barking until you throw "a sop to Cerberus."

Tell me now, is there any comedian or pitchman you would rather see than these men when they orate in their sermons, imitating quite absurdly but still very amusingly what the rhetoricians have handed down about the way

to make a speech? Good lord! How they gesticulate, how fittingly they vary their tone of voice, how they croon, how they strut, continually changing their facial expressions, drowning out everything with their shouts! And the mysterious secret of this oratorical artistry is passed down personally from one little friar to another. Though it is not lawful for me to know it, I will guess at it anyway and come as close as I can.

First of all, they make an invocation, a device they have borrowed from the poets. Then, if they are going to talk about charity, their exordium has to do with the Nile River in Egypt. Or if they are going to discourse on the mystery of the cross, they open their sermon very auspiciously with Bel, the dragon of Babylon. Or if they are going to discuss fasting, they open with the twelve signs of the zodiac. Or if they are going to speak about faith, they go through a long prologue about squaring the circle. I myself once heard an eminent fool—I beg your pardon, I mean scholar—who was going to explain the Holy Trinity in a sermon before a large audience. To show that his learning was far above the ordinary and to meet the expectations of the theologians among the hearers, he invented a completely new approach—namely, to start with the letters, syllables, and the whole word, then to take up the agreement of noun and verb, adjective and substantive, to the amazement of many listeners, some of whom muttered to themselves that question in Horace "What is he driving at with all this damned nonsense?" He finally came to the conclusion that the rudiments of grammar give such a clear picture of the whole Trinity that no mathematician could make it any plainer by drawing in the dust. And this *theologicissimus* had sweated over this oration for eight whole months, so much so that to this day he is blind as a bat, since all the acumen of his sight was

diverted to the sharpness of his wit. But the man hardly regrets his blindness and considers it a small price to pay for such glory.

We once heard another preacher, an old man of eighty, so thoroughly theological that you would have thought he was Scotus come back to life. Undertaking to explain the mystery of the name *Jesus*, he showed with amazing subtlety that whatever could be said on this subject was hidden in the very letters of the name. That it has only three inflectional endings is a clear sign of the Trinity. Then, that the first inflection (*Jesus*) ends in *s*, the second (*Jesum*) in *m* and the third (*Jesu*) in *u* conceals an *unspeakable* mystery: namely, the three letters show that he is first (summum), middle (medium), and last (ultimum). He had in store for us an even more recondite mystery: dividing “*Jesus*” into two equal parts leaves a pen-themimer in the middle. Then he explained that in Hebrew this letter is *sb*, pronounced “sin.” Now in the language of the Scots, I think, “sin” means “peccatum.” Thus we have a very clear indication that it was *Jesus* who took away the sins of the world. Everyone was struck with open-mouthed wonder at this novel *exordium*, especially the theologians, so that they almost shared the fate of Niobe. But my fate was nearly that of Priapus, that good-for-nothing figwood statue, who, much to his dismay, watched the nocturnal ceremonies of Canidia and Sagana. And certainly with good reason. For when did Demosthenes among the Greeks or Cicero among the Romans ever think up such an *exordium* as this? They considered an introduction faulty if it strayed too far from the subject at hand. As if any swineherd, taught by nature alone, wouldn’t have enough common sense to begin with something relevant. But these learned friars think their preamble (for that’s their word for it) will be most exquisitely rhetorical only if it has absolutely nothing

to do with the subject matter, so that the bewildered listener mutters under his breath “What is he up to now?”

In the third part, which serves as a narration, they interpret something from the gospel, but fleetingly and as if in passing, though that is the only thing they ought to be doing in the whole sermon. In the fourth section, assuming an entirely new character, they raise some theological question, often enough one that is neither here nor there, and they think that this too belongs to the art of preaching. Here they really ruffle their theological feathers, quoting solemn doctors, subtle doctors, most subtle doctors, seraphic doctors, cherubic doctors, holy doctors, irrefragable doctors, dinning these grandiose titles into our ears. Then, preaching to uneducated laypeople, they put on display their syllogisms, majors, minors, conclusions, corollaries, most jejune hypotheses and utterly pedantic quibbles. There remains now the fifth act, in which it behooves them to perform with the greatest artistry. Here they haul out some foolish folktale, something from the *Speculum Historiale*, say, or the *Gesta Romanorum*, and interpret it allegorically, tropologically, and anagogically. In this fashion they put together their chimera, one far beyond what Horace imagined when he wrote, “If to a human head, etc.”

But they have heard from somebody or other that the beginning of a speech should be quite restrained, not at all loud. And so in the opening they start out so softly that they can’t even hear their own voices, as if it did any good to say something that no one can understand. They have heard that exclamations should sometimes be employed to stir up the emotions. Thus, in the middle of a passage delivered in a low voice, every now and then they suddenly raise their voices and shout like crazy men, even when there is no need for it at all.

You would think they needed a dose of hellebore, as if it made no difference at what point you raise your voice! Moreover, because they have heard that a sermon should gradually become more and more fiery, they begin the individual parts in a more or less reasonable tone of voice; but then they suddenly burst out in an incredible vocal barrage, even if the subject is quite dry and abstract, breaking off at last in such a way that you would think they had run out of breath.

Finally, they have learned that the rhetoricians have something to say about laughter, and hence they also take pains to sprinkle in a few jokes. But those jokes (by all that's refined!) are so elegant and so appropriate that they would remind you of an ass playing a harp. Sometimes they are also satirical, but in such a way as to titillate rather than wound. And they never serve up more genuine flattery than when they try hardest to give the impression of speaking sharply. In short, their whole performance is such that you would imagine they had taken lessons from some street peddler, except that the friars lag far behind them. Still, they resemble each other so closely that no one can doubt that the friars learned their rhetoric from the peddlers or the peddlers from the friars.

And even so, these preachers, with my help, find people who listen to them with as much admiration as if they were Demosthenes himself or Cicero. This group consists mostly of merchants and fine ladies. The friars devote all their energies to pleasing the ears of these people because the merchants, if they are rubbed the right way, will usually give them some of their booty, a little slice of their ill-gotten gains. The women have many reasons for granting their favors to the friars, but the chief one is that they are accustomed to pour into the sympathetic ear of the friars the grievances they hold against their husbands.

You can see, I think, how much this class of men owes me: though in fact they browbeat mankind with their petty observances and ridiculous nonsense and screaming and shouting, they think they are veritable Pauls or Anthonys. But I am glad to be done with these playactors, whose ungrateful disavowal of my benefits is matched by their disgraceful pretense to piety. . . .

Then too, the lifestyle of princes has long since been diligently imitated, and almost surpassed, by popes, cardinals, and bishops. In fact, if anyone should consider the moral meaning of the linen rochet, so striking because of its snowy whiteness, namely, a life innocent in all respects; or the significance of the miter, with its two horns joined by one knot at the top, namely a thorough knowledge of both the Old Testament and the New; or the meaning of hands protected by gloves, namely, administering the sacraments with purity undefiled by merely human considerations; or of the crosier, the most watchful care of the flock entrusted to him; or of the cross carried before him, that is, victory over all human passions; if, I say, anyone should consider these things and others like them, would he not lead a life full of grief and anxiety? But now they do a fine job if they feed themselves. The care of the sheep they either commend to Christ himself or pass on to their brothers, as they call them, and vicars. They don't so much as remember their own name—what the word "bishop" means—namely, painstaking labor and concern. But in casting their nets for money, there they play the bishop, and keep a sharp enough lookout.

In the same way, if cardinals realized that they have succeeded in the place of the apostles and are required to perform the same functions; then, if they thought that they are not lords but ministers of spiritual gifts, for every one of which they will soon have to give a most exact

account; indeed, if they even gave a little serious consideration to their apparel and thought to themselves: "What does the whiteness of this garment mean? Isn't it the most eminent and flawless innocence of life? What does the scarlet underneath mean? Isn't it the most burning love of God? And then what is meant by the scarlet outside, flowing down in such wide undulations and completely covering the Most Reverend Father's mule?—though, for that matter, it would be enough by itself to cover a camel. Isn't it charity reaching out far and wide to help everyone, that is, to teach, exhort, console, reproach, advise, settle wars, resist wicked princes, and freely give not merely riches but even life-blood for Christ's flock—though why should any riches at all belong to those who act in the place of the poor apostles?" If they considered these things, I say, they would not strive to get that office and would gladly relinquish it, or at least they would lead very laborious and anxious lives, such as those ancient apostles lived.

Now, as for the popes, who act in Christ's place, if they tried to imitate his way of life—namely, poverty, labor, teaching, the cross, *contemptus mundi*—if they thought of the name "pope" (that is, "father") or of the title "most holy," who on earth could be more miserable? Or who would spend everything he has to buy that office? Or defend it, once it was bought, with sword, poison, and all manner of violence? How many advantages would these men be deprived of if they were ever assailed by wisdom? Wisdom, did I say? No, even by a single grain of that salt mentioned by Christ. So much wealth, honor, power, so many victories, offices, dispensations, taxes, indulgences, so many horses, mules, retainers, so many pleasures! You see what a warehouse, what a harvest, what a sea of good things I have gathered together. These would be replaced by vigils, fasts, tears,

prayers, sermons, studies, sighs, and thousands of such wretched labors. Nor should we neglect another point: so many scribes, copyists, notaries, advocates, ecclesiastical prosecutors, so many secretaries, mule-curriers, stableboys, official bankers, pimps (I had almost added something more delicate, but I am afraid it might sound indelicate to some ears), in short, the huge mass of humanity which weighs down—pardon me, I meant "waits on"—the see of Rome would be turned out to starve. Certainly an inhuman and monstrous crime! And, what is even more abominable, the very highest princes of the church, the true lights of the world, would be reduced to a scrip and a staff.

But as it is now, they leave whatever work there is to Peter and Paul, who have plenty of free time. But the splendor and the pleasures, those they take for themselves. And thus, through my efforts, I have brought things to such a pass that almost no sort of person leads a softer, more carefree life, since they think they have done quite well by Christ if they play a bishop's role with mystical and almost theatrical pomp, with ceremonies, with titles like "your Beatitude," "your Reverence," "your Holiness," with blessings and anathemas. For them, to perform miracles is old-fashioned, outworn, completely out of step with the times; to teach the people is burdensome; to interpret Holy Scripture, academic; to pray, otiose; to pour forth tears, base and womanish; to be in want, degrading; to be conquered, disgraceful and quite unsuitable for one who hardly allows even the greatest kings to kiss his blessed foot; and finally, to die seems disagreeable; to be lifted up on the cross, disreputable.

All that is left are the weapons and sweet benedictions mentioned by Paul, and with such things they are sufficiently liberal: with interdicts, suspensions, formal warnings—denounced and reiterated—solemn excommunications, pic-

tures of vengeance meted out to heretics, and that horrific lightning bolt which they employ with a mere nod to send the souls of mortals to the bottomless pit of perdition. That bolt, however, these most holy fathers in Christ and Christ's vicars on earth hurl at no one more fiercely than at those who, at the instigation of the devil, seek to diminish and gnaw away the patrimony of Peter. Though Peter says in the gospel, "We have left all and followed you," they interpret his patrimony as fields, towns, taxes, imposts, dominions. While they fight for such things with burning Christian zeal and defend them with fire and sword, not without the loss of much Christian blood, they believe this is the very way to defend apostolically the church, the bride of Christ, manfully putting her enemies to flight, as they say. As if the church had any more deadly enemies than impious popes, who allow Christ to fade away in silence, who bind him with mercenary laws, who defile him with forced interpretations, who murder him with the pestilent wickedness of their lives.

Thus, although the Christian church was founded with blood, confirmed with blood, expanded with blood, nowadays they settle everything with the sword, just as if Christ had perished completely and would no longer protect his own in his own way. And although war is so inhuman that it befits beasts, not men, so insane that even the poets imagine that it is unleashed by the Furies, so noxious that it spreads moral corruption far and wide, so unjust that it is normally carried on best by robbers, so impious that it is utterly foreign to Christ, still they neglect everything else and do nothing but wage war. Here you can see rickety old men demonstrate the hardiness of a youthful spirit, not upset by any expense, not wearied by any labors, not the least bit disturbed by the thought of reducing all human affairs,

laws, religion, peace, to utter chaos. Nor is there any lack of learned flatterers who call this patent madness by the names zeal, piety, and fortitude, having devised a way to allow someone to unsheathe cold steel and thrust it into his brother's guts without any offense against that highest duty of charity which, according to Christ's precept, he owes to his fellow Christian. Indeed, I am still not sure whether the popes have set or followed the example of some German bishops who pay no attention to vestments or benedictions or any such ceremonies but carry on as secular lords, plain and simple, so much so that they consider it cowardly and hardly worthy of a bishop to render up their courageous souls to God anywhere but on the front lines of the battle.

Now the general run of priests, thinking it would be a crime for them to fall behind the holy dedication of their superiors—good lord! how stoutly they fight for their right to tithes, with sword, spear, stones, with every imaginable sort of armed force. In this point how sharp-sighted they are in ferreting out of the writings of the Fathers anything they can use to intimidate the simple people and make them think they owe even more than a tenth. But at the same time, it never occurs to them how often those writings explain the duties which priests in turn are supposed to perform for the people. They do not even consider what their tonsure means: that a priest is supposed to be free from all worldly desires and ought to meditate on nothing but heavenly matters. But these agreeable fellows say they have fulfilled their duty perfectly once they have mumbled through their office in some fashion or other—as for me, by heaven, I would be amazed if any god either heard or understood such prayers, since they themselves can hardly be said to hear or understand them at the very time their mouths are bawling them out.

But priests have this in common with laymen: they all keep a sharp lookout to harvest their profits, and in that point no one is ignorant of the laws. But if there is some responsibility, they prudently shift that onto someone else's shoulders and pass the buck down the line from one to another. In fact, even lay princes, just as they parcel out the duties of ruling to deputies, and the deputies pass them on to subdeputies, so too they leave all the practice of piety, in their modesty, to the common people. The people foist it off on those whom they call ecclesiastics, for all the world as if they themselves had nothing to do with the church, as if their baptismal vows had had no effect whatever. Then the priests who call themselves secular—as if they were united to the world rather than to Christ—pass on the burden to the canons regular, the canons to the monks, the laxer monks to the stricter ones, both groups to the mendicant orders, the mendicants to the Carthusians, and with them alone piety lies buried, hidden away in such a manner that it hardly ever appears. In the same way popes, however diligent in harvesting money, delegate their excessively apostolic labors to the bishops, the bishops to the pastors, the pastors to their vicars, the vicars to the mendicant friars; and they too foist off their charge on those who shear the fleece of the flock.

But it is no part of my present plan to rummage through the lives of popes and priests,

lest I should seem to be composing a satire rather than delivering an encomium, or lest anyone should imagine I am reproaching good princes when I praise bad ones. Rather, I have touched briefly on these matters to make it perfectly clear that no mortal can live happily unless he is initiated into my mysteries and has gained my favor.

From C. H. Miller, trans., *Desiderius Erasmus: The Praise of Folly* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 87–106, 110–15.



Recommended for Further Reading:

- Bossy, John. *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- McConica, James. *Erasmus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Oberman, Heiko. *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Swanson, R. N. *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Tentler, Thomas. *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977.