

Concerning Heretics¹

**Whether they are to be persecuted
And how they are to be treated**

**A collection of the opinions of learned men
Both ancient and modern.**

**A most timely book in the view of the present turbulence
And highly instructive to all
And especially to princes and magistrates
To show them their duty in a matter
So controversial and dangerous**

**"He that was born after the flesh persecuted
him that was born after the spirit." GAL. 4: 2**

¹ Excerpts from by Sebastian Castellio's *De haereticis*, published in Basel in 1554, under the pseudonym Martín Bellius, with the place of publication given as Magdeburg, rather than Basel. The translation is that of Roland Bainton, published by Columbia University press, 1935. Pagination of the Bainton edition is given in brackets in the text. Unless indicated otherwise, the footnotes are Bainton's. My footnotes are marked with my initials: EMC.

Castellio's work is a combination of pieces which he himself wrote under various pseudonyms (like Martin Bellius' dedication to Duke Christoph, or the Dedication of the French version to William of Hesse, or the excerpts ascribed to 'Basil Montfort' and 'George Kleinberg') and excerpts from Church fathers and contemporary theologians who had written in favor of tolerating heretics, like Lactantius, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Erasmus, and Luther. Some of these authors had also written against tolerating heretics, but where that is the case, Castellio reproduces only the passages favoring toleration. These selections concentrate on the portion of the work which Bainton ascribes to Castellio himself, omitting most of the excerpts from other authors (except for Augustine, Luther, John Brenz and Calvin).

**Dedication by Martin Bellius
To Duke Christoph of Württemberg.**

Martin Bellius to Duke Christoph of Württemberg, Greeting.

Most Illustrious Prince, suppose you had told your subjects that you would come to them at some uncertain time and had commanded them to make ready to go forth clad in white garments to meet you whenever you might appear. What would you do if, on your return, you discovered that they had taken no thought for the white robes but instead were disputing among themselves concerning your person? Some were saying that you were in France, others that you were in Spain; some that you would come on a horse, others in a chariot; some were asserting that you would appear with a great equipage, others that you would be unattended. Would this please you?

Suppose further that the controversy was being conducted not merely by words but by blows and swords, and that one group wounded and killed the others who did not agree with them. "He will come on a horse," one would say.

"No, in a chariot," another would retort.

"You lie."

"You're the liar. Take that." He punches him.

"And take that in the belly." The other stabs.

Would you, O Prince, commend such citizens? Suppose, however, that some did their duty and followed your command to prepare the white robes, but the others oppressed them on that account and put them to death. Would you not rigorously destroy such scoundrels?

But what if these homicides claimed to have done all this in your name and in accord with your command, even though you had previously expressly forbidden it? Would you not consider that such outrageous conduct deserved to be punished without [122] mercy? Now I beg you, most Illustrious Prince, to be kind enough to hear why I say these things.

Christ is the Prince of this world who on His departure from the earth foretold to men that He would return some day at an uncertain hour, and He commanded them to prepare white robes for His coming, that is to say, that they should live together in a Christian manner, amicably, without controversy and contention, loving one another. But consider now, I beg you, how well we discharge our duty.

How many are there who show the slightest concern to prepare the white robe? Who is there who bends every effort to live in this world in a saintly, just, and religious manner in the expectation of the coming of the Lord? For nothing is there so little concern. The true fear of God and charity are fallen and grown cold. Our life is spent in contention and in every manner of sin. We dispute, not as to the way by which we may come to Christ, which is to correct our lives, but rather as to the state and office of Christ, where He now is and what He is doing, how He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and how He is one with the Father; likewise with regard to the Trinity, predestination, free will; so, also, of God, the angels, the state of souls after this life and other like things, which do not need to be known for salvation by faith (for the publicans and sinners were saved without this knowledge), nor indeed can they be known before the heart is pure (for to see these things is to see God Himself, who cannot be seen save by the pure in heart, as the text says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God)." [Matt. 5: 8] Nor if these are known do they make a man better, as Paul says, "Though I understand all mysteries and have not love it profiteth me nothing." [I Cor. 13: 2-3] This perverse curiosity engenders worse evils. Men are puffed up with knowledge or with a false opinion of knowledge and look down upon others.

Pride is followed by cruelty and persecution so that now scarcely anyone is able to endure another who differs at all from him. Although opinions are almost as numerous as men, nevertheless there is hardly any sect which does not condemn all others and [123] desire to reign alone. Hence arise banishments, chains, imprisonments, stakes, and gallows and this miserable rage to visit daily penalties upon those who differ from the mighty about matters hitherto unknown, for so many centuries disputed, and not yet cleared up.

If, however, there is someone who strives to prepare the white robe, that is, to live justly and innocently, then all others with one accord cry out against him if he differ from them in anything, and they confidently pronounce him a heretic on the ground that he seeks to be justified by works. Horrible crimes of which he never dreamed are attributed to him and the common people are prejudiced by slander until they consider it a crime merely to hear him speak. Hence arises such cruel rage that some are so incensed by calumny as to be infuriated when the victim is first strangled instead of being burned alive at a slow fire.

This is cruel enough, but a more capital offense is added when this conduct is justified under the robe of Christ and is defended as being in accord with his will, when Satan could not devise any-thing more repugnant to the nature and will of Christ! Yet these very people, who are so furious against the heretics, as they call them, are so far from hating moral offenders that no scruple is felt against living in luxury with the avaricious, currying flatterers, abetting the envious and calumniators, making merry with drunkards, gluttons, and adulterers, banqueting daily with the scurrilous, impostors, and those who are hated of God. Who then can doubt that they hate not vices but virtues? To hate the good is the same as to love the evil. If, then, the bad are dear to a man there is no doubt but that the good are hateful to him.

I ask you, then, most Illustrious Prince, what do you think Christ will do when he comes? Will he commend such things? Will he approve of them?

Consider this case for a moment, I beg you. Suppose that accusation were brought in your city of Tübingen against a man who spoke of you in this fashion: "I believe that Christoph is my prince, and I wish to obey him in all things, but I do not believe what you say, that he will come in a chariot. I think he will come [124] on horseback. Neither do I agree with you that he will be clothed in red. I think he will wear white, and as for his command that we bathe in this river, I think we should do so in the afternoon, you think it should be done in the morning. If I thought that he wished me to bathe in the morning I would do it, but I am afraid of offending him, and I wish to follow my conscience."

Now I ask you, Prince, would you condemn such a citizen? I do not think so. If you were present you would rather commend the simplicity and obedience of such a man than condemn his ignorance, and if others put him to death you would certainly punish them.

Now take this case in the same way. There is a citizen of Christ who speaks of him in this manner: "I believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ His Son, and wish to live according to their commandments, which are contained in Holy Scripture, but as for his command that we take his body and blood, I think this should be in both kinds, and with regard to the command that we be baptized, this I think should be done on the eighth day from the birth of the child after the manner of circumcision." Do you think that such a man should be put to death for this? I do not think so.

And if he says this: "I believe that a man ought not to be baptized until he is first able to give a reason for the faith that is in him. If I thought otherwise, I would act otherwise, for it would be no more difficult for me to baptize an infant than an adolescent. But I dare not vio-

late my conscience lest I offend Christ who has forbidden by his servant Paul that I do anything about which I am in doubt whether it is good or bad. I must be saved by my own faith and not by that of another." I ask you whether Christ, who is the judge of all, were he present, would command that such a man be put to death? I do not think. so, especially when you look at the life and nature of Christ, who certainly never commanded nor did anything of the sort, but rather the absolute contrary. And if Christ did not so act, neither should they who [125] have their authority from him, lest they be reproached, and rightly reproached, with the common proverb, "You are a servant of the devil because you have done more than you were told,"² or rather you have done the opposite of what you were told. If God so severely punished Saul for not having killed him whom God had commanded to kill, [1 Samuel 15] how much more severely will he now punish those who kill them whom God has forbidden to kill? especially in view of the fact that God now is much more inclined to mercy than to wrath.

What I have said with regard to baptism applies equally to the other articles of religion which are in dispute, where someone believes in God and in Christ His Son, and serves Him according to conscience, but errs somewhat in ignorance, or to us seems to err. When I consider the life and teaching of Christ who, though innocent Himself, yet always pardoned the guilty and told us to pardon until seventy times seven [Matt. 18: 22] I do not see how we can retain the name of Christian if we do not imitate His clemency and mercy. Even if we were innocent we ought to follow Him. How much more when we are covered with so many sins? When I examine my own life I see so many and such great sins that I do not think I could even obtain pardon from my Savior if I were thus ready to condemn others. Let each one examine himself, sound and search his conscience, and weigh his thoughts, words, and deeds. Then will he see himself as one who is not in a position to remove the mote from the eye of his brother before he has taken the beam from his own. In view of the many sins which are laid to us all, the best course would be for each to look to himself, to exercise care for the correction of his life and not for the condemnation of others. This license of judgment which reigns everywhere today, and fills all with blood, constrains me, most Clement Prince, to do my best to staunch the blood, [126] especially that blood which is so wrongfully shed – I mean the blood of those who are called heretics, which name has become today so infamous, detestable, and horrible that there is no quicker way to dispose of an enemy than to accuse him of heresy. The mere word stimulates such horror that when it is pronounced men shut their ears to the victim's defense, and furiously persecute not merely the man himself, but also all those who dare to open their mouths on his behalf; by which rage it has come to pass that many have been destroyed before their cause was really understood.

Now I say this not because I favor heretics. I hate heretics. But I speak because I see here two great dangers. And the first is that he be held for a heretic, who is not a heretic. This happened in former times, for Christ and his disciples were put to death as heretics, and there is grave reason to fear a recurrence in our century, which is not better, but rather worse. The danger is greater because Christ said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother," [Matt. 10:34-35; Luke 12: 51-53] etc. You see how easy it is for calumniators to say of a Christian, "This man is seditious. He sets a son at variance against his father and disturbs the public peace." Great care must be exercised to distinguish those who are really seditious from Christians. Outwardly they do the same thing

² Adapting a German proverb which says that "too much is Satan's game."

and are adjudged guilty of the same crime by those who do not understand. Christ was crucified among thieves.

The other danger is that he who is really a heretic be punished more severely or in a manner other than that required by Christian discipline. For these reasons I have collected in this book the opinions of many who have written on this matter, in order that a consideration of their arguments may lead to less offense for the future. I have given first place to the opinions of con-temporaries, partly because they cite the ancients, so that in the moderns you have both the old and the new, and partly because contemporaries write more fully and accurately and with an eye [127] to our own time. They have learned something from these very persecutions. The ancients wrote principally against the pagans by whom they were persecuted so long as they followed Christ and the apostles, who never persecuted anyone, but rather were persecuted by all. But when sins increased and the Gentiles ceased to persecute, then Christians rose up against Christians, especially if they saw anyone a trifle too stiff in his defense of the truth. If his conduct were irreproachable they would cavil at his doctrine of which the common man could not judge so easily as of conduct. So it has come about that all the saints have suffered persecution, although not all who have suffered persecution are saints. This you will discover, that persecution has always accompanied genuine religion, and when true religion has ceased, then persecution has also ceased. The ancient Church was persecuted so long as she retained true godliness, but later on, when all had entered the service of the devil and no one resisted him, then the Church was freed from persecution. If in our age none were genuinely religious there would be no persecution, for why should Satan persecute his servants? But as soon as the godly arise there appear also those who shall vex them. This vexation has sharpened their wits and has enabled them to write many things well and pointedly concerning persecution.

If, however, any of those whom I have cited have elsewhere or afterwards written or acted in a different sense or shall so write or act, let us, nevertheless, adhere to their first opinion, because it was written in a time of tribulation when men are the more accustomed to write the truth, and because it is especially consonant with the meekness and mercy of Christ. If anyone should preach another gospel, be he St. Paul or an angel from heaven, let him be anathema; [Gal. 11:8] for often it happens that when men first embrace the Gospel they think and judge well of religion so long as they are poor and afflicted, especially because poverty and affliction are peculiarly capable of the truth of Christ, who was himself poor and afflicted. But these same men, when elevated to riches and power, degenerate, and those who before defended Christ, now [128] defend Mars and convert true religion into force and violence. Wherefore, in such matters none may be more surely trusted than those who are afflicted and have not where to lay their heads. [Luke 9:58] I was moved by many reasons, Prince Christopher, to send you the opinions of many, though not of all, such authors. First, because I hear that you have always favored the Gospel and persevered therein even in the midst of calamities and afflictions. Witness the confession which you alone of all the princes of Germany sent to the last meeting of the Council of Trent,³ by which you made it plain that you did, not flee the light, but wished. to make known to all the world your faith and religion. A further reason was that in your exalted position of authority it is highly expedient that you be well versed in this matter in order that you may rule your

³ The confession was composed by John Brenz, a Lutheran theologian in Duke Christoph's court. The Council of Trent was a church council first convened in 1545, which met intermittently until 1563. Initially convened in the hope of bridging the differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the various Protestant denominations which had sprung up during the Reformation, its primary accomplishment was to define Catholic doctrine. (EMC)

people justly and well. I hope, too, that you may be able to persuade neighboring princes to do the like, and especially the king of France, if by any means it be possible to restore tranquillity to this Christian state which has been so long and so miserably distraught, that the people may be summoned to correct their lives, if perchance God may turn away His wrath which He has conceived against the race of men and may enlighten us by the light of His countenance.

Finally, I have dedicated this book to you because the opinion of your doctor John Brenz is included among the others. Immediately after the publication of this work, as I hear, the cruelty of persecution was diminished and not so many were put to death thereafter. Such was the force of, the opinion of one man of sound judgment even in times so corrupt.

[129] Keep on, Brenz, and advance in this Christian clemency in which you have commenced. You have already staunched much blood by your little book. You could have done nothing more pleasing to Christ nor more displeasing to Satan. Would that others had done as you and had sought like you not to shed blood, but to stem the flow. Then we should not have seen so many fires, so many swords dripping with the blood of the innocent, and we should not now be eating fish fattened on the blood of those for whom Christ gave his own. O Princes, open your eyes and make not so cheap the blood of men that you shed it thus lightly, especially for the sake of religion. If anyone judge without mercy, with that same measure shall it be meted to him again.

Furthermore, inasmuch as the following opinions discuss only the treatment and not the definition of a heretic, and the point is of prime importance, I shall briefly explain, in accord with the Word of God, who is a heretic, in order that we may the better understand how such an one is to be treated, for I do not consider that all those are heretics who are so called. The term heretic in the days of St. Paul was not so obnoxious that the heretics were considered worse than the avaricious or hypocrites, or the scurrilous or flatterers. Today no one is put to death for avarice, hypocrisy, scurrility, or flattery, of which it is often easy to judge, but for heresy, of which it is not so simple to judge, so many are executed. After a careful investigation into the meaning of the term heretic, I can discover no more than this, that we regard those as heretics with whom we disagree. This is evident from the fact that today there is scarcely one of our innumerable sects which does not look upon the rest, as heretics, so that if you are orthodox in one city or region, you are held for a heretic in the next. If you would live today, you must have as many faiths and religions as there are cities and sects. Just as he who travels from country to country must change his money from day to day, since the coin which is accepted in one place is rejected in another, unless indeed the money be gold, which is valid everywhere regardless of the imprint.

[130] Likewise in religion let us use the gold coin which is everywhere acceptable no matter what the image. Now, to believe in God the Father Almighty, the Son, and Holy Spirit, and to approve of the commandments of true religion as set forth in Holy Scripture, this is the gold coin, which is better certified and approved than gold itself. But until now this money has had many different imprints and images according as men disagreed with one another with regard to the Lord's Supper, baptism, and the like. Let us bear with one another and not readily condemn the faith of someone else, a faith which is based on Jesus Christ. And now to come to the point, let us not make the opinion of the common man the test of heresy, but rather the Word of God, and let us thus see who is a heretic.

The name "heretic" is found only once in the Scriptures, in the Epistle of Paul to Titus, the third chapter, "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." [Titus 3:10-11] If we compare this passage with the command of Christ in Matthew 18 we shall understand who is a heretic: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between

thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church: but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." [Matt. 18:15-17] From this passage it is evident that the heretic is an obstinate man who does not obey after due admonition, since the man whom Paul calls a heretic, Christ describes with the words, "if he will neither hear thee nor the others," and again, "Shake off the dust of your feet." [Matt. 10:14] The words of Paul that he "sinneth being condemned of himself" [Titus 3:10] are equivalent to those which Christ adds directly to the above passage, [131] "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," [Matt. 18:18] that is to say, All those whom you hold as heathen and publicans the Lord also will hold as heathen.

Moreover, there are two kinds of heretics or obstinate persons: the first are obstinate or stubborn as to conduct, such as the avaricious, scurrilous, voluptuous, drunkards, persecutors, and the like, who being admonished, do not correct their lives. Such are the Jews, Scribes, and Pharisees; wherefore the Savior avoided them when He said, "Your house is left unto you desolate." [Matt. 23:38; Luke 13:35] Such also were those of Jesus' own country, among whom He could do no mighty work because of the hardness of their hearts. [Mark 6:5; Matt. 13:58] The second are those who are obstinate in spiritual matters and in doctrine, to whom the term properly belongs, for the word heresy is Greek and means a sect or opinion. Wherefore those who adhere to some vicious sect or opinion are called heretics. Of this sort was Hananiah, the false prophet whom Jeremiah avoided when he could not recall him from his error. Jeremiah predicted to him his death in accord with the command of the Lord, not of the magistrate. This Hananiah was a pernicious heretic, who withdrew the people from their obedience. From this example alone we may readily see how heretics of this sort are to be treated.

But to judge of doctrine is not so simple as to judge of conduct. In the matter of conduct, if you ask a Jew, Turk, Christian, or anyone else, what he thinks of a brigand or a traitor, all will reply with one accord that brigands and traitors are evil and should be put to death. Why do all agree in this? Because the matter is obvious. For that reason no controversies are raised and no books are written to prove that brigands, etc., should be put to death. This knowledge is engraved and written in the hearts of all men from the foundation of the world. This was what St. Paul meant that the Gentiles have the law written in their hearts," for infidels themselves may judge of these matters.

Now let us take up religion and we shall find that it is not so [132] evident and manifest. The heathen were formerly of the opinion that there are many gods. Christ, by his coming, removed this error, so that now neither the Turks nor any other nations entertain a doubt whether there is but one god. On this point all agree with the Christians. If anyone denies the Lord God, this one is and an infidel and atheist and is deservedly to be abhorred in the eyes of all. The Turks go further and believe in that God of whom Moses wrote. In this they agree with the Jews and with the Christians without any controversy. The faith of the three peoples is common up to this point. But the Turks share with the Christians a higher regard for Christ than that of the Jews. The Christians go beyond all others in that they regard Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior and Judge of the world. And this belief is common to all Christians. And just as the Turks disagree with the Christians as to the person of Christ, and the Jews with both the Turks and the Christians, and the one condemns the other and holds him for a heretic, so Christians disagree with Christians on many points with regard to the teaching of Christ, and condemn one another

and hold each other for heretics. Great controversies and debates occur as to baptism, the Lord's Supper, the invocation of the saints, justification, free will, and other obscure questions, so that Catholics, Lutherans, Zwinglians, Anabaptists, monks, and others condemn and persecute one another more cruelly than the Turks do the Christians. These dissensions arise solely from ignorance of the truth, for if these matters were so obvious and evident as that there is but one God, all Christians would agree among themselves on these points as readily as all nations confess that God is one.

What, then, is to be done in such great contentions? We should follow the counsel of Paul, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not. . . . To his own master he standeth or falleth." [Rom. 14:3-4] Let not the Jews or Turks condemn the Christians, nor let the Christians condemn the Jews or Turks, but rather teach and win them by true religion and justice, and let us, who are Christians, [133] not condemn one another, but, if we are wiser than they, let us also be better and more merciful. This is certain that the better a man knows the truth, the less is he inclined to condemn, as appears in the case of Christ and the apostles. But he who lightly condemns others shows thereby that he knows nothing precisely, because he cannot bear others, for to know is to know how to put into practice. He who does not know how to act mercifully and kindly does not know the nature of mercy and kindness, just as he who cannot blush does not know the nature of shame.

If we were to conduct ourselves in this fashion we should be able to dwell together in concord. Even though in some matters we disagreed, yet should we consent together and forbear one another in love, which is the bond of peace, until we arrive at the unity of the faith. But now, when we strive with hate and persecutions we go from bad to worse. Nor are we mindful of our office, since we are wholly taken up with condemnation, and the Gospel because of us is made a reproach unto the heathen, for when they see us attacking one another with the fury of beasts, and the weak oppressed by the strong, these heathen feel horror and detestation for the Gospel, as if it made men such, and they abominate even Christ himself, as if he commanded men to do such things. We rather degenerate into Turks and Jews than convert them into Christians. Who would wish to be a Christian, when he saw that those who confessed the name of Christ were destroyed by Christians themselves with fire, water, and the sword without mercy and more cruelly treated than brigands and murderers? Who would not think Christ a Moloch, or some such god, if he wished that men should be immolated to him and burned alive? Who would wish to serve Christ on condition that a difference of opinion on a controversial point with those in authority [134] would be punished by burning alive at the command of Christ himself more cruelly than in the bull of Phalaris,⁴ even though from the midst of the flames he should call with a loud voice upon Christ, and should cry out that he believed in Him? Imagine Christ, the judge of all, present. Imagine Him pronouncing the sentence and applying the torch. Who would not hold Christ for a Satan? What more could Satan do than burn those who call upon the name of Christ?

O Creator and King of the world, dost Thou see these things? Art Thou become so changed, so cruel, so contrary to Thyself? When Thou wast on earth none was more mild, more clement, more patient of injury. As a sheep before the shearer Thou wast dumb. When scourged, spat upon, mocked, crowned with thorns, and crucified shamefully among thieves, Thou didst pray for them who did Thee this wrong. [Luke 23:34] Art Thou now so changed? I beg Thee in the name of Thy Father, dost Thou now command that those who do not under-

⁴ Phalaris was a tyrant of classical antiquity for whom was constructed a bronze bull in which a man could be burned. The cries of the victim would seem to issue from the nostrils of the bull.

stand Thy precepts as the mighty demand, be drowned in water, cut with lashes to the entrails, sprinkled with salt, dismembered by the sword, burned at a slow fire, and other-wise tortured in every manner and as long as possible? Dost Thou, O Christ, command and approve of these things? Are they Thy vicars who make these sacrifices? Art Thou present when they summon Thee and dost Thou eat human flesh? If Thou, Christ, dost these things or if Thou commandest that they be done, what hast Thou left for the devil? Dost Thou the very same things as Satan? O blasphemies and shameful audacity of men, who dare to at-tribute to Christ that which they do by the command and at the [135] instigation of Satan! But I will restrain myself. I think, Prince, you already sufficiently understand how far such deeds are contrary to the teaching and practice of Christ. Let us, then, now hear the opinions of others. You will find them speaking, however, as if it were already clear who are the true heretics.

[136]

Dedication of the French Version
To William of Hesse

To the Most Illustrious Prince, Count William of Hesse.

Noble and exalted Prince, for three reasons I have been moved to dedicate to you this present work which I have translated from Latin into French. The first is that I understand you like to read French, and the second is that, while practicing the language, you may be increasingly instructed as to your exalted office, of which King David admonishes you saying, "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." [Psalm 2: 10-11] If you do this, you will take care, along with all good princes, not to credit lightly the tales of the envious in whatever station they be, who often accuse an upright and God-fearing man. If they find nothing amiss in his life or conversation they seek an occasion against him touching the law of his God and call him a heretic, as we read that this was done to Daniel by the counsellors of Darius, king of the Chaldaeans. They were angry with Daniel because he had authority over them and because "a more excellent spirit was in him," and they "sought to find occasion against him concerning the kingdom: but they could find none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful." Then they contrived an accusation "concerning the law of his God." Would that good kings and princes would diligently consider this account which, like the rest of Scripture, has been given for their instruction. [II Timothy 3:16] Let them beware of believing those who would impel them to kill and burn anyone for faith and religion, which above all else should be free, since it resides not in the body but in the heart, which cannot be reached by the sword of kings and princes. Let rulers content themselves to prevent the [137] bad from injuring the good either in their property or their persons, as St. Paul teaches in Romans 13.

Sins of the heart, such as infidelity, heresy, envy, hate, etc., are to be punished by the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. If anyone disturbs the commonwealth by an assault under color of religion, the magistrate may punish such an one not on the score of religion, but because he has done damage to bodies and goods, like any other criminal. If anyone conducts himself amiss in the Church, both in his life and in his doctrine, the Church should use the spiritual sword, which is excommunication, if he will not be admonished. Then, if after excommunication, he perseveres in his evil design to the point of disturbing the peace, the Christian magistrate may see to it that he no longer trouble the Church with his heresies and blasphemies which are plainly contrary to the Word of God. Of such a character is the teaching of those who deny the creation of the world, the immortality of souls and the resurrection, as well as of those who repudiate the office of the magistrate in order that they may the better disturb the state to their hearts' content without reproof. These men thrive on disturbance, to which the Spirit of God is utterly alien. If they continue to disobey princes and magistrates, they may be punished, but not with the death penalty, as St. Augustine teaches, especially in the case of those who admit one true God, the source of all good, but err obstinately in the understanding of some passages of Scripture. The good magistrate will content himself with punishing them by a fine or some similar penalty. Then, if they continue, he may banish them from the land. This is the extreme penalty. If they come back they may be imprisoned if they do not amend. This, Prince, is the way in which emperors and magistrates punished the heretics in the early Church, as you may read in the present

book, which is both useful and necessary in these last days in which not only those who have never properly known the truth, but even those who glory in it, nevertheless thirst for the blood of any who contradict them and try to stop bloodshed for the sake of religion. Hereby the persecutors show how far they are from the clemency of Christ and His apostles, from the [138] on how hot I will haul inmercy of the doctors of the primitive Church who begged the princes and magistrates not to kill and burn the heretics, as you may read in this book. Follow St. Augustine, Chrysostom, and Jerome and the other doctors so long as they follow Scripture, as Augustine himself advises us to do,⁵ and, on the contrary, avoid those who urge that we kill and burn any for the faith. Certainly they are of the nature of the devil and of Antichrist, who desire the death of poor souls, whereas true Christians desire that sinners and adversaries of the truth turn and live. Beware of false doctors and the writings of those who cannot suffer the assertion that heretics should not be killed lest their souls be destroyed. These doctors make simple people believe that those who object to coercion do so in order the more readily to disseminate their poison. But the same may be said of the doctors. That is just what they have done. May the Lord cause them to recognize their blindness and ill will.

But here we must be careful not to brand as seditious those who reprove the false doctors and teachers for their evil life and teaching. It is certain that 'the prophets and the apostles and even our Savior Jesus Christ were held as seditious blasphemers and heretics. The charge was brought against them that they wished to destroy the law of Moses which was ordained of God and declared to be eternal. But Christ and the apostles came not to destroy, but to fulfill, [Matt. 5:17] and to show for what purpose the ceremonies were instituted. Yet the people would not hear, especially when reproved for their faults, and sought to remove the critics from the earth, just as men do today when fraternally admonished.

The third reason is that you may avoid the great and terrible wrath of God which shall come upon those who shed blood for religion, and that rather all manner of good may come to you and to your subjects. If because of bloodshed the Savior destroyed Jerusalem which was so dear to him, as you may read in the Lam[139]entations of Jeremiah: "For the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her" [Lam. 4:13] she was destroyed, what will be done to those who, under the guise of heresy and false prophecy, kill those who contradict them? It were better to let a hundred, or even a thousand, heretics live than to kill one upright man under the color of heresy. We know well that all the prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and even our Savior Jesus Christ, were put to death as false prophets, blasphemers, and heretics. This ought to fill us with fear and trembling when it comes to persecuting a man for his faith and his religion, which consists not in some ceremony or indifferent matter, not in some dubious or ambiguous doctrine (for he who persecutes may quite as well be mistaken as the one who is persecuted), as to the manner of receiving the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, whether it should be given to infants since they are baptized, or whether it is better to wait until they be grown and understand, etc. Religion does not consist in some point which transcends human understanding and concerning which we have no indisputable passages of Scripture, as, for example, in the understanding of the three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is enough for us to believe that there is one substance in three persons without bothering ourselves unduly as to how one is related to the other. We need not worry whether the body of Christ is in heaven, whether God has created some to be damned and others to be saved, how Christ descended into hell, and the like. On these points each may be left

⁵ *On the grace of Christ* XLIII, 47

to his own opinion and to the revelation of the Savior. It is sufficient to accept the fundamental points of true religion -which consists in believing that God is the source of all good, that man is condemned be-cause of the disobedience of the first man and saved by the obedience of the second, who is Jesus Christ our Savior, provided a man, moved by the true fear of God, repent of his former evil life and resolve firmly not to return to it again, and that he apply especially to himself with a firm faith the 'death and resurrection [140] of Jesus Christ who was born, suffered, died, and rose for us, that we might be planted in him as the apostle shows us when he says, "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." [Rom. 6:5] He died for us, to reconcile us to his Father, to justify all those who believe truly in Him and die also to the world and to their desires. Therefore it is said that "Christ is raised up from the dead that we also should walk in newness of life." This is the cause of His death and resurrection. In a word, we are the servants of Him whom we obey. [Rom. 6:16] If of sin then are we of all men the most miserable,' even though we believe the twelve articles of the faith,⁶ and agree with the whole Church in doctrine and ceremonies, and attend church diligently.

Illustrious Prince, would you not consider one of your officers craven if he left your service for some good-for-nothing? To be sure. How much more craven is he who leaves the service of the King of Kings, of the Prince of Princes to serve the devil, that is, himself, his flesh, his desires, his ambition, and his appetite for honor and riches? There is no comparison. Indeed, if we consider a moment the grandeur and the power of God and the littleness and feebleness of man, however great he may be in this world, we should never leave the service of such an exalted prince, which consists in keeping His command to let the tares⁷ grow together with the wheat." We should never leave Him to serve such a poor knave as the devil, the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning," of whom our God, by His dear Son Jesus Christ, our Savior, tells us to beware. Amen, Amen.

"Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the some rule, let us mind the same thing." Philip. 3.

⁶ The reference is to the Apostles' Creed which was divided into twelve articles, one for each of the apostles.

⁷ 'Tares' is a synonym for 'weeds,' the term used in the NRSV translation of the parable in Matt. 13:24-30. (EMC)

[141]

Excerpts
MARTIN LUTHER
On Civil Government, the Second Part,
"On the Scope of the Magistrate's Authority."

We come now to the main portion of the discussion. Having learned that there must be civil government on the earth and how it may be exercised in eight Christian and helpful manner we must now consider the question of its jurisdiction, lest it encroach upon the domain of God. This point is very important, for grievous disaster may result either from an undue extension or from an undue restriction. In the one case the government punishes too little, in the other too much. Though it is better to err on the side of leniency, since it is altogether preferable to spare the guilty than to kill the innocent. The world has rascals in abundance, but the good are scarce.

First of all we must observe that the children of Adam fall into two groups, the one in the kingdom of God under Christ, the other in the kingdom of the world under the magistrate, as we have said above. These two groups have two sets of laws, for every kingdom must have laws, since without laws no kingdom can stand as daily experience reveals. Civil government has laws which extend only to bodies and goods on earth. God, who alone has jurisdiction [142] and authority over the soul will not suffer it to be subject to mundane laws. When civil government undertakes to legislate for souls, then it encroaches upon the province of God and merely perverts and corrupts souls. I wish to make this clear as day that our bishops and princes may see what fools, not to say scoundrels, they are when they seek to coerce men by laws and commandments to believe this or that.

If a man imposes laws, according to his fancy, upon the souls of men, this certainly is not in accord with the Word of God, and must of necessity displease God, who desires that our faith be built solely upon His Word, as He says in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, [Matt. 16:18] "On this rock I will build my Church," and John, the tenth chapter, [John 10:27, 5] "My sheep hear my voice and know me. A stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him." Hence it follows that the civil ruler forces souls to eternal death by such an iniquitous law, for he compels men to believe that that is pleasing and acceptable to God, which is most certainly displeasing and unacceptable because unconfirmed by the testimony of the divine Word. He who believes that to be true and certain, which is false and uncertain, prefers error to truth and embraces injustice for justice.

Wherefore they ought to be sent to the asylum who command that men believe the Church, the Fathers, and the councils even though unsupported by the Word of God. The devil's ministers do that, not the Church, for the Church commands nothing without a sure word of God, as St. Peter says [I Peter 4:11] "If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God." But they will succeed in proving that their counsels are the Word of God [143] when crows are white.

Even greater is the folly when the objection is made that kings, princes, and the multitude believe thus. Away with the multitude. We were not baptized into kings, princes, and the multitude, but into Christ and God himself. We are called Christians from Christ and are not named after these. No one ought or can command the soul unless he is able to show it the way to heaven, but no man can do that, only God. Wherefore in matters which affect the soul nothing is to be taught or received except the pure [and eternal] Word of God.

Yet, consummate fools though they be, they must confess that they have no authority over souls. No man can kill the soul or make it alive, lead it to heaven or to hell. Christ makes this plain in the tenth chapter of Matthew; [Matt. 10:28] do you "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." These words show clearly enough that the soul is exempt from the hand of man [and the secular magistrate] and is subject only to the authority of God. Now tell me, how much sense has he who lays commands on a region over which he has no jurisdiction? Who would not think such an one more foolish than Melitide, who commanded the moon to shine according to his fancy? Suppose that [144] Geneva should legislate for Venice," or *vice versa*, would they not need a dose of hellebore to cure their insanity? Nevertheless our kings and princes suffer themselves to be led by the blind guides, the pope, bishops, and sophists, to the point of enjoining their wishes upon the belief of subjects regardless of the Word of God, and yet our rulers desire to be known as Christian princes.

No authority whatever has the right to act except in so far as it is able to see, know, judge, pass sentence, add or alter, for nothing should be more certain than judgment, to which everything should be clear, investigated, and weighed; but the secrets of the heart and soul are manifest to God alone, who, in the tenth chapter of Acts⁸ is described as "one who knows hearts," and in many passages of the prophets. Hence it is both futile and presumptuous to command or to try to compel anyone to believe this or that. Force achieves nothing. Another way must be adopted.

I am astounded at the big fools, for they all confess, "De occultis non judicat ecclesia,"⁹ the Church does not judge of secret matters. Nevertheless they venture to judge and regulate something so secret and divine as faith.

Now everyone is in danger for himself regarding his belief and . must see for himself that he believes correctly. As nobody can go [145] to heaven or hell for you, so nobody can believe or not believe for you; and as nobody can open or close heaven or hell for you, so nobody can drive you to faith or to unbelief. Since, then, belief or unbelief pertains to the conscience of each, civil authority, which is not lessened thereby, should be content to attend to its own affairs. Every man should be allowed to believe as he will and can, and no one should be constrained. Nothing should be so free as faith and religion to which no one can be driven. Since this is a divine work in [the Holy] Spirit, human force is of no avail. Hence the common saying which Augustine also uses, "no one can or ought to be constrained to believe."¹⁰

These poor blind folk do not see how futile and impossible are their attempts. However much they command and rave, they can-not force men to follow save with the mouth and the hand. The heart they cannot compel, though they burst themselves in the attempt. True is the proverb, "Thoughts are tax free." Why, then, do they try to make men believe with the heart, when obviously it cannot be done? Why do they compel weak consciences to lie, to deny [Christ], to say what they do not believe in their hearts, to burden themselves with the sins of others? All of the lies and confessions of weak consciences shall recoil on the heads of those who compel them. It were much simpler to let subjects err than to drive them into lies and

⁸ Acts 1: 24 and 15: 8. Castellio has not corrected Luther's reference, but in the Latin has introduced the Greek word from Acts 15: 8.

⁹ From Cardinal Cajetan's *Commentary on the complete works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Question XI, Art. II.

¹⁰ *Contra litteras Petilianas*, II, 8.3 (184).

false confessions.

Would you know why God suffers the civil rulers to act so atrociously? I will tell you. "God gave them over to a reprobate mind" [Rom. 1:28] that He might make an end of them as also of the spiritual lords, who ought to perform their office and preach the pure Word of God, but leaving this they have become civil lords ruling with laws which apply only to the body. How completely the roles are reversed! Whereas bishops ought to feed souls with the Word of God, instead, they rule castles, cities, lands, and people with external domination and plague souls with unspeakable atrocities [146] ties. Likewise, the civil authorities ought to govern their subjects with even-handed justice; on the contrary they do nothing but fleece and flay, impose tax upon tax and tribute upon tribute, and entrust public affairs to the wolves, until not a vestige remains of justice, truth, and faith. Little wonder that our society is decadent, since it is disturbed by those who should establish tranquillity. Princes, leaving their natural function, wish to legislate for hearts and consciences, bishops assume the administration of worldly affairs. Sacred and secular are confused and each is contaminated by the sins of the other, until the civil government, laden with the hate of God and men, goes under, along with bishops, priests and monks, one scoundrel with another. Then they blame the Gospel, and rather than praise God they curse and blaspheme. Thus they suffer only what they have richly deserved. This is the counsel of God on the mighty of the world. But they will never have faith lest the wrath of God should be turned away by their repentance.

Someone may object, Does not Paul say in the thirteenth chapter of Romans, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers"? [Rom. 13:1] And Peter says, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man." [1 Peter 2:13] Precisely! These passages are on my side. St. Paul was talking about civil government. You have just heard that no one has authority over souls except God. Hence Paul cannot be talking about an obedience where there is no jurisdiction. We readily see, therefore, that he is not talking about faith, lest it be 'made subject to the commands of civil government. But he is talking about external goods, which the magistrate may regulate on earth. That this is the meaning, his words abundantly show where he prescribes the limits of authority and obedience, "Render, therefore, to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." [Rom. 13:7] You [147] see that civil obedience and authority apply only externally to tribute, custom, honor, and fear. Again especially where he says, "Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil," [Rom. 13:3] he assigns limits to the magistrate, that he should punish crimes and not coerce faith and the Word of God. Likewise St. Peter, when he says, "ordinance of man." [1 Pet. 2:13] An ordinance of man does not reach to heaven, nor can it touch the soul, but remains on earth and cares for earthly things where men are able to see, judge, pass sentence, punish, and save.

Christ also made this distinction neatly, when he said in the twenty-second chapter of Matthew, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." [Matt. 22:21] If the hand of Caesar reaches unto the kingdom and authority of God, there would be no difference, and why then should a distinction be made? For, as we have said, the soul is not subject to the authority of Caesar. He can neither teach nor guide it, kill nor make alive, bind nor loose, judge nor absolve, retain nor remit, all of which he would be able to do, if his authority extended to souls. And all of this he may do with regard to bodies, goods, and honor, because these are subject to his jurisdiction.

And David, too, long ago clearly and briefly stated this truth in the one hundred and thirtieth Psalm: "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to

the children of men." [Ps. 115:16] That is to say, man has authority from God with regard to that which is on earth and pertains to earthly rule, but God alone is Lord of heaven and the celestial kingdom. And did not Moses mean the same thing, when he said, "Let us make man, and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth"? Gen. 1:26] And the sum of the whole matter is contained in this, "We ought to obey God rather than men," [Acts 5:29] as St. Peter says in the fourth chapter of Acts, where he assigns limits to the secular magistrate, for if we ought to do everything which the civil government commands, what point would there be in saying, "We ought to obey God rather than men"?

If, then, a prince or civil ruler tells you to believe this or that, or to go counter to Holy Scripture, then you must say, "Lucifer may not sit by the side of God. I owe you obedience, noble prince, in that which affects body and goods. Command me to the extent of your authority on earth and I will promptly obey, but if you command me to believe according to the judgment of others or to give up my books, I will not obey, for in this you play the tyrant and exceed the bounds of your jurisdiction commanding that which lies neither in your authority nor power." If, then, the magistrate, like a plunderer, despoils you of your goods on account of such disobedience, blessed are you. Praise God, who has deemed you worthy to suffer for His obedience. Let the fool rage; he will find his judge. I tell you if you do not withstand him, but instead consent to let him rob you of faith and books, you have denied God.

I will give you an example; the tyrants have somewhere promulgated an edict that whoever has a New Testament should give it up to the magistrates and their delegates. In this case the duty of the subject is to refuse to give up one page or syllable, lest he lose his eternal salvation. He who obeys, betrays Christ to Herod, for these Herods wish to kill Christ. One should suffer, however, invasion of premises and seizure of books and goods at the behest of tyrants. Violence is not to be resisted, but endured, yet not without protest [before God], since these tyrants act like princes of the world to which they belong. Now the world is the enemy of God. If, then, the tyrants would receive honor, they must do what the world approves and what God disapproves. Thus they remain princes of the world. Marvel not if they fume and rage against the Gospel. They must be true to their name and title. Truly from the beginning of the world a wise prince is a rare bird, and a just and good prince still more rare. Much more numerous have been the [Midases, Caligulas, and Neros]. Many [149] of them are God's torturers and hangmen whom the Almighty uses in His wrath to punish the bad and maintain the civil peace.

Wherefore, since it is necessary to have rich, noble, and powerful hangmen, God is pleased that we should call the agents of His wrath by imposing titles, as "clement and gracious Lords," that we bow down before them and obey them in all humility, so long as they keep within bounds and do not become butchers and gladiators. But when God does grant a good Christian prince, prudent and God-fearing, that is a great and most precious sign of God's love toward His people. Usually the princes fulfill the saying of Isaiah in the third chapter: "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them." [Is. 3:4] Or of Hosea, thirteen: "I gave thee a king in mine anger and took him away in my wrath." [Hos. 13:11] The world is too bad and perverse to deserve good and prudent princes. Serpents must rule over frogs.

Again, you may object that civil government compels no one to faith or religion, but merely provides that men shall not be seduced by false doctrine. How otherwise are heretics to be avoided? I answer: that this care appertains to the office not of the prince, but of the bishop, for heretics cannot be avoided by any outward force. Some other means must be employed than the severity of the sword. God's Word is the sole recourse, and if this does not avail worldly con-

straint is vain, though the earth be inundated with blood. Heresy is a spiritual thing which can be cut with no iron, burned with no fire, and drowned with no water. Only with the Word of God can it be cut, burned, and drowned, as Paul says in II Corinthians 10[:4-5] "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

[150] Moreover, faith and heresy are never so entrenched as when they are opposed by sheer violence apart from the Word of God, for everyone can see that such violence lacks a just cause, since it proceeds without the Word of God, and can defend itself only by pure force like a brute beast. Even in civil affairs force has no place unless injustice has already been convicted by justice. How much more is it impossible to proceed in these exalted and arduous cases by sheer violence without justice and the Word of God? See what wise lords these are who wish to drive out heresy, but succeed only in fortifying their enemies and making themselves suspect and in the wrong. Would you eliminate heresy, then you must devise a plan to pluck it from the heart and root it out of the desires. With force you will merely entrench, not expel. What have you accomplished if you confirm heresy in the heart and weaken it only on the tongue and drive men to lies? But if you strive with the Word of God, this will enlighten the heart and all heresy and error will vanish of itself...

In a word, the princes and tyrants of this world do not understand that to fight heresy is nothing other than to fight the devil, who has possessed hearts with error, as St. Paul says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." [Eph. 6:12] If, then, Satan is not expelled from the heart I do as much good by destroying his vessel with the sword and fire as if I were to fight lightning with straw. As Job testifies in the forty-first chapter [Job 41:27] the devil "esteemeth iron as straw" and has no fear of its violence. If all the [151] Jews and Turks were killed or tormented none thereby would be overcome and converted to Christ.

What a spectacle it is to see the princes of the world. Neither part performs its office. Bishops exercise themselves to condemn the Word of God and commit the cure of souls to secular princes, while the spiritual lords rule by the sword rather than by the Word of God. The civil rulers in turn overlook, or themselves commit, usury, theft, adultery, robbery and the like and leave it to the bishops to punish these offenses by excommunication. The shoe is on the wrong foot. Souls are governed by swords and bodies with bulls. Secular lords govern spiritual matters, and spiritual lords the secular. What better Halloween pranks could the devil play on earth? These are our Christian princes who defend the faith and devour the Turk! To these lords we must commit the state whose wisdom turns things upside down and involves their people in ruin.

I should like, however, to give a word of counsel to the poor blind people. Let them remember the little sentence of David in Psalm 107[:40] "He poureth contempt upon princes." I swear solemnly before God that if this saying applies to you, princes, you are lost, though each one of you be as mighty as the Turk. Your snorting and cruelty will do you no good. Al-ready this begins to be fulfilled. There are few princes who are not regarded as fools and knaves, and rightly so. The common man is waking up. The scourge of the princes, which God calls "con-tempt" is gathering momentum among the common people, and there is grave danger that insurrection cannot be avoided unless the princes begin to show themselves to be truly such by ruling justly in the fear of God with mercy and mildness. Men will not and

cannot longer endure your tyranny and hardness of heart. Be wise, princes, consider and amend, for God will no longer suffer your iniquity. The world is not as it used to be that you should stalk and hunt the people like game. Leave off your outrage and force; remember to deal justly. Give free course to the Word of [152] God, else it will take it in spite of you. Should heresy arise, let it be overcome by the Word of Almighty God. If you use the sword more than is meet, beware lest someone come who will tell you to put it up, and that not in the name of Christ.

You may object: If the sword has no place among Christians how can there be outward government? Even among Christians there must be government. I answer: Among Christians there can be no higher power. Each is subject to the other as St. Paul says in Romans 12[:10] "In honor preferring one another," and in the first Epistle of St. Peter 5[:5] "Be subject one to another." Christ also confirms this teaching, ["The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them . . . but it shall not be so among you"]¹¹ . . . Among Christians no one is more eminent than Christ Himself, for what preeminence can there be among those who are equal and equally enjoy the same right, power, goods, and honor; among whom no one seeks to be greater, but rather to be less? Among such men authority cannot be used, even if desired, because their nature and character forbid it. Where men like this are not to be found there are no true Christians.

What place is there, then, for priests and bishops? I answer: Their rule does not consist in authority and force, but in service and ministry, for they are not higher nor better than other Christians. They should not impose laws and statutes upon others without their will and consent. The office of spiritual rulers is to preach purely the Word of God and with it to govern [and feed the flock of Christ], and drive away heresies [and wolves], for Christians, as we have said, cannot be led nor governed by anything other than the Word of God, as St. Paul says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." [Rom. 10:17] Those who have no faith are not Christians and do not belong in the kingdom of Christ, but in the kingdom of the world, where they must be ruled and [153] constrained by the sword and outward administration. But Christians, on their own initiative, do their duty, moved only by the Word of God [and His Spirit]. But of this I have written elsewhere, much and often.

**The Same, in His Postills on the Gospel of the Tares for
the Fifth Sunday After Epiphany on the Twenty-fourth
Chapter of Saint Matthew**

We learn from this text ... how we should treat heretics and false teachers. We are not to root them out nor put them to death. Christ makes this perfectly plain, when he says, "Let both grow together."¹² Combat them only with the Word of God, for he who is astray today, may return tomorrow to the right path. Who knows when the Word of God may move his heart? But if he is burned, or otherwise destroyed, his conversion is rendered impossible. He is cut off from the Word of God, and he who might otherwise have been saved is of necessity lost.

There is, besides, another grave danger of which Christ warns us in this passage, namely, that the wheat be rooted out with the tares. This is atrocious in God's eyes and absolutely indefensible.

¹¹ Matt. 20:25-26; Luke 22:25-26.

¹² Matt. 13:30.

See, then, what mad folk we have so long been, who have wished to force the Turk to the faith with the sword, the heretic with fire, and the Jews with death, to root out the tares with our own power, as if we were the people who could rule over hearts and spirits and make them religious and good, which God's Word alone must do. But by death we cut them off from the Word, so that it cannot operate, and we do our best to bring upon our heads the responsibility for two deaths, in that we destroy at once the body temporally and the spirit eternally, and we say afterwards that we have rendered God a service and have earned some credit in heaven. Wherefore the inquisitors and murderers, if their brows be not iron, might well be terrified by this parable, if they had genuine heretics before them. As it is, they burn true saints and are [154] themselves heretics. What does this come to, if not that, like imbeciles, they are rooting out the wheat and calling it the tares?

**Another Passage from Dr. Martin Luther from the Sermon
on the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday After Trinity, Luke 6**

If the poor hardened Papists were not such bitter enemies of the truth, and of us on account of the truth, they could see by our lives that we have well kept the injunction of Christ to be merciful, for, praise God, we have taken vengeance on no man who has done us wrong, nor have we driven any from house, castle, wife, and child. We have thrown no one into prison because of his faith, much less on this account have we beheaded, drowned, burned, or hanged anyone, as these gentle saints have done, shedding innocent blood, and still do. Rather we have kept this teaching and in-unction of Christ. We honor the magistrate with our teaching in so far as he does right. We pray for him. in public and in private and administer to him in writings friendly and earnest admonitions as to his office, as God has commanded and enjoined upon us, etc.

**THE OPINION OF JOHN BRENZ WHETHER THE
MAGISTRATE HAS AUTHORITY TO PUT TO
DEATH ANABAPTISTS AND OTHER HERETICS**

Among the divisive errors, which have arisen in our time on account of the Christian faith, not the least is that of the Anabaptists so called, who through a misunderstanding of baptism teach that no children should be baptized before the age of reason. Infant baptism is of no avail. For that reason they baptize themselves over again in their maturity. They also practice community of goods, carry no sword, refuse to take an oath to the civil govern[155]ment, and declare that no Christian can bear the sword of the magistrate, and other like articles are deduced from an ignorance of Scripture.

Inasmuch as the Bible abundantly demonstrates that repetition of baptism is a disparagement of the sacrament and the teaching of the Anabaptists is a new, pharasaical and monkish seduction the question then arises as to what is to be done to ward off and wipe out this fanatical heresy. Some magistrates think that fire and sword are the appropriate means for the extermination of heresy, and they appeal to the imperial law which prescribes the death penalty for Anabaptism.¹³

The first question then for our consideration is whether according to the imperial law all Anabaptists without distinction should be put to death.

Now, to begin with, we must distinguish two kinds of offenses, spiritual and civil. To the spiritual belong unbelief, despair, despondency, misunderstanding of Scripture, heresy, secret hate and envy, covetousness of another's goods or wife or anything else which offends God, but does not disturb the public peace. Among the civil offenses are treason, murder, robbery, theft, adultery, and whatever else destroys social tranquillity.

For these two types of offense God has ordained two types of swords and punishments. The spiritual are punished by the Word of God, the civil by the sword of the emperor. Each offense should be handled with that weapon only which is effective in suppression. Now spiritual sin is so subtle and the sword of the magistrate is so crass and carnal that it serves rather to erect than to eradicate. Spiritual sins do not reveal themselves with an evil countenance like murder and robbery, but appear adorned with respectability and prudence. No unbelief is so bad as to be bereft of plausibility, and no heresy so false as to lack Scriptural warrant. If, then, with the civil sword we attempt to punish unbelief and mere heresy, we simply entrench the devil and drive things from bad to worse. To Satan applies the passage in Job 41[:26-28] "The sword of him that layeth [156] at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee." But the Word of God puts him to flight when his impostures and lies are disclosed. Then he canno longer stand. For when the devil fights with unbelief and heresy no other resistance is necessary than to drag him to the light and disclose his wiles. He is the father of lies, [John 8:44] and hateth the light. [John 3:20] As soon as the Prince of Darkness comes to the light of the truth he must cringe and fail.

The civil sword is not so mighty that it can disclose a secret sin in the same manner as a public offense, or strip hidden injustice of its alluring disguise. Such constraint only makes it the more intriguing. Unbelief and heresy are the more confirmed in their error by mere civil persecution. So long as the grace of God is lacking for the conviction of heretics, and they continue to defend their position from Scripture, however wrongly interpreted, prosecu-

¹³ *Codex Theod.*, XVI, 6, 6; *Codex Iust.*, I, 6, 2.

tion must look like persecution for the Word of God. Torture but hardens their obstinacy to their own corruption and the readier seduction of those who see their steadfastness. For this reason the best way is to let the Gospel and the Holy Scripture only fight with heresy that by their revelation it may be exposed and denuded of its fair display.

Before the world heretics may perfectly well appear as upright, if not orthodox. So long, then, as they do not commit murder, adultery, and theft, do violence to no man and keep the civil peace; so long as they "render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor," as St. Paul writes to the Romans [13:7], civil punishment has no jurisdiction over them. Paul says that the magistrate is a "minister of God . . . a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. [Rom.13:4] This text is by all means to be referred to civil offense and not to spiritual unbelief. Murderers, criminals, and public enemies are subject to civil punishment. Unbelievers and heretics, who live "prightly before the world, are subject to the [157] Gospel and to God in the next world. This was the command of Christ to his disciples in Matthew 13[:30] that they should not root out the tares, but "let both grow together until the harvest, etc." Christ means that Christians should not root out unbelievers and heretics –these are the tares – with the bodily sword, but should fight only with spiritual weapons until the harvest. Then the heretics will receive their punishment, if they have not changed. If unbelievers and heretics are put to death they are deprived not only of their bodies here, but also of their souls hereafter, because they might have turned from unbelief and error to the true faith, from which they have been prevented by the tyranny of the magistrate...

The objection may be raised that Christ and Paul, by virtue of their office, put no one to death, whether the sin were great or small, but restored even penitent murderers and adulterers. I answer, It is true that the Gospel puts no one to death. Public offenders are excluded from the Christian congregation by the ban and treated as the heathen and the publican. [Matt. 18:7] If they change their lives, they are restored to communion and declared to be Christians. At the same time the Gospel does not interfere with the office of the magistrate, provided he keeps within his proper bounds and punishes what he has authority to punish, namely, civil offenses, which disturb the public peace. If the sword intrudes into that which has been committed to the Gospel and God's Word, such as unbelief and heresy, then disturbance rather than peace will result, and the sword will be blunted through usurpation of an alien office... The heresy of the Anabaptists, if I judge correctly, has been fostered by nothing so much as by a tyrannical use [158] of the sword wielded against them without the authority of the Word of God and the instruction of the Holy Scripture. God is angered because of this misappropriation of the civil sword for spiritual offenses and, to punish men, has given the devil free range to rage and establish his error. Civil punishment has produced no improvement among the common people, but has merely confirmed error precisely because the affair of the Anabaptists is not a public offense but a hidden illusion supported by Scripture.

This shows plainly and abundantly that unbelief and heresy, so long as nothing else is involved, are subject only to the punishment of the Word of God. If they break loose and commit sedition, murder, or some other crime, then, and then only, are they subject to the correction of the civil sword. The fact of unbelief and heresy, in such cases, is irrelevant. These offenses are punished in the case of heretics and unbelievers on precisely the same grounds as when committed by those of apparent orthodoxy. In a word, unbelief and heresy belong not to the civil, but to the spiritual, sphere. Otherwise, if unbelief were subject to the

sword of the magistrate, then would the magistrate himself be as amenable to the sword as his subject, and if heresy were to be expelled by force what point would there be in studying Scripture? The hangman would be the most learned doctor.

In favor of the contrary view, appeal is made to Deuteronomy 13[:1-10, condensed]"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, etc., but that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, etc."

And again in the same chapter: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, say [159] ing, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers, etc., thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be the first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones that he die."

These are the two laws of Moses, which are adduced to prove that heretics should be put to death by the civil sword, because we are told that the introduction of heresy is equivalent to leading men away from the true God and His Word to another god and lies.

But Christianity is fundamentally different from Judaism. Among the Jews there were physical promises, physical blessings, a physical land, a physical kingdom, and priesthood: there was also a physical slaughter of enemies. These were but types of the truth to be manifested in Christianity. And the physical blessing of the Jews corresponds to the spiritual blessing of Christians, and the physical kingdom to the spiritual kingdom. The physical extermination of the Canaanites, Jebusites, and false teachers foreshadowed the spiritual extermination of the enemies of the Christian, that is, his sins and also false teachers. Sin in the body is to be repressed by the Spirit of God, and false teachers are not to be followed in the faith, but, as Paul said, are to be rejected.

Christ taught the same thing in Matthew 18[:8] "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee cut them off and cast them from thee." This saying has reference not merely to the corporal hand or foot, but also to the spiritual, to teachers, friends, and companions. Nor is the cutting off corporal, but rather spiritual. The meaning is this. If you have a minister, friend, or helper who offends you by false teaching or seduces you with an evil life you are not to obey him, but cut him off, that is, avoid his company and let him be as a heathen and a publican. [Matt. 18:17] This spiritual avoidance or separation was signified in the law by the physical slaughter of the false prophets.

[160] ...The objection is made that the corporal punishment of heretics is not committed to the Gospel and to preachers whose office is purely spiritual, but rather to the civil magistrate. I answer, as I have done above, that each office must stay within the prescribed limits. So long as the unbeliever or heretic conducts himself in civil matters in an upright and irreproachable fashion, the civil sword has no jurisdiction over him. What has it to do with unbelief or heresy? The function of the civil sword is to maintain the civil peace and not exceed the appointed bounds. The magistrate sets a highly dangerous precedent when he introduces the custom of suppressing any faith with the sword. He may indeed attack an erroneous faith, but his successors, having acquired the method, may turn against the true

faith. This happened in the Arian controversy. The bishops accustomed the Roman emperors to persecute the Arian heretics. Then some of the emperors, already indoctrinated with this technique, were converted to the Arian position and began to persecute the orthodox bishops and to treat them as heretics. For this reason the safest course is for the civil government to adhere rigidly to its own domain and to suffer spiritual sins to receive a spiritual punishment, for it were four times or ten times better that an erroneous faith be tolerated than that the true faith be persecuted.

[161] But now to leave heresy in general and to take up the Anabaptists again. The contention is made that Anabaptism is not simple heresy, but has accompaniments which fall within the sphere of the civil government, for the Anabaptists teach that goods should be held in common. Now this tenet might perhaps produce an insurrection. Very well, but one cannot legitimately put the Anabaptists to death on this score. They do not teach that others should be forced to practice community of goods, and they themselves constrain no one. Neither should we proceed against them with constraint.

Until now the monks and nuns have taught and held that anyone joining their orders must renounce private property and hold all things in common with them. How, then, does it come about that because of this very teaching the monks have been reputed as learned, saintly, God-fearing, and perfect Christians, but now, for precisely the same doctrine, the poor Anabaptists are strangled and put to death? Their hypocritical monastic position is not the fruit of baseness or malice, but of simplicity and ignorance in the understanding of certain passages of Holy Scripture. But if a man is immediately to be put to death because he misunderstands one or two passages of Holy Scripture, who would be secure from the sword? We find that almost all the saintly doctors failed on one in-juspassage or another. Ought they then to have been killed? What injustice?

The proper treatment for the misunderstanding [of the Anabaptists] is friendly and Christian instruction and not the sword of the magistrate. If they receive our teaching we have gained some for Christ and our side is increased. If they will not be instructed, then let them go and treat them as the heathen and the publican, but the magistrate should not meddle, unless in addition to erroneous belief there is also a civil offense...

[162] ...The Anabaptists may well have some knaves among them who meditate revolt or other crimes, but we are discussing the genius of the movement and not particular black sheep. There is no faith and no profession without its discreditable representatives. If there is to be punishment, let it apply to them and not to the simple and ignorant. Time and again men, women, and maidens, though all their lives opposed to dissension, have nevertheless fallen into error. Ought they, then, to be put to death as disturbers of the peace?

A further objection is raised that even if the Anabaptists are not amenable to civil correction because of their communism, neverthe [163] less they are because of their other tenet that no Christian can be a magistrate, and because they refuse to take an oath of allegiance to the government for civil protection.

Very well! This is their teaching and practice; but if they are to be put to death on this account, a beginning should be made with the priests and monks, for the "religious," to use the name which has been applied peculiarly to them, have been preeminently guilty on this score. They are the ones who have taught that no religious should pass a judgment of blood, and that no one who had done so should be received into their orders without a dispensation. Does not this mean that the office of the magistrate is forbidden to genuine Christians seeing that all genuine Christians ought to be religious, and the office of the magistrate cannot be conducted

without the shedding of blood?... If then anyone were to be put to death on this account, who might be punished more appropriately than the religious, inasmuch as they have erred as grievously as the Anabaptists? They are both wrong in their interpretation that the Christian, as a Christian, may not wield the sword of the magistrate and shed blood because the Christian must be meek, forgiving, long-suffering, leaving vengeance to the Lord. The Anabaptists are wrong that the Christian in the role of the magistrate may not use the sword. God has instituted the magistracy and a Christian may better exercise this institution or office than a non-Christian. Equally is it true that the spiritual officer, the bishop, priest, or preacher, may not wear the sword because of his spiritual office. In committing the Gospel to the apostles and preachers, Christ at the same time instructed them not to use the sword as does the civil magistrate. They were not to suppose that the commission to preach the Gospel and to bind and loose carried with it authority [164] to employ the civil sword. The prohibition of Christ applied not to their person in case they should be elected to the government or drafted by the government, but to their office. The apostles and their successors have no civil authority because they have received a spiritual commission... The religious were mistaken in that they associated the prohibition of bloodshed and of the exercise of civil authority not to the office, but to the consecrated person. If men are to be put to death on account of one error, who would be left alive? There would be no end to extermination.

But what then is to be done, seeing that the Anabaptists will neither promise nor swear to the civil government? The answer is that the Anabaptists should receive precisely the same treatment as the religious. If they will not swear civil obedience deprive them of civil rights. Treat them as foreigners who, on coming into a town, refuse to swear, on the pretense that they have done so elsewhere. The maximum penalty which can properly be inflicted is the denial of civil privileges. Anything beyond that is tyranny. Why then should the Anabaptists receive a harsher sentence?...

[169]... It befits a Christian magistrate that he be not as bloodthirsty as a heathen. It befits him that, as a Christian, he have regard to the cure of souls and not merely to vengeance like a tyrant. But what sort of cure is this, to teach and instruct with the sword of the executioner the poor Anabaptists, who have fallen into error because of a mere misunderstanding of Scripture? No insurrection were to be feared from these people if the civil sword were otherwise properly employed. Let the magistrate attend to his office, oppress not the poor, forget not to protect the unfortunate, to guard widows and orphans, to give justice without respect of person according to the requirement of his office. Then he need fear no insurrection.

Rebellion is not so much the work of evil men as it is the consequence of the evil lives of rulers and subjects. Here is the principal cause of insurrection, as we plainly see in the case of King David. If he had not committed adultery, if he had not shed the innocent blood of Uriah [II Sam. 11], and had accorded perfect justice to his acts, then his son, however bad he might have been, would not have been able to hatch a conspiracy against his father and the poor subjects would not have suffered so miserably [II Sam. 15].

The magistrates, therefore, should restrain the hand of correction from the simple Anabaptists and leave them to the chastisement of the Gospel. Let the rulers exert every effort to maintain peace and concord. Let anyone who disturbs the peace, be he Baptist or Anabaptist, receive the appropriate penalty.

ERASMUS

The Reckoning of the Errors in the Censure of Beda

(Proposition XXXII.) The householder, that is, God, does not desire that the false prophets and heretics be rooted out, but that they be tolerated, if perchance they may repent and from tares be turned into wheat. If they do not repent they are to be reserved for

[170] the judgment of Him to whom eventually they will pay the penalty. ...

First of all I should like to know whether Beda approves of our Lord's parable of the tares and the wheat. If he does, as I suppose he does, then I should like to know whether he approves of the interpretation of the orthodox Fathers, especially Jerome and Chrysostom. The latter copiously teaches that the Lord forbade putting heretics to death. Among other things Chrysostom says this: "The Lord did not forbid us to dissolve the assemblies of the heretics, to stop their mouths, and to take away their freedom of speech. He forbade us merely to kill and slay."¹⁴ If I have correctly interpreted the passage in accord with the Gospel and the explanation of the ancient scholars, that the field is the Church, the seed is the evangelical doctrine, the householder is the Heavenly Father, or, if you like, Christ, the servants are the apostles and the leaders of the Church, the enemy is the devil, the tares are the doctrine of the heretics, the harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels of God; if this is correct, why throw up at us the Wyclifites, Bohemians, the damned Lutherans, schisms of the Empire, and laws of the Church? Do I take away the sword of the magistrate, which is ordained of God even for the Gentiles for the vengeance of the bad and commendation of the good? [Rom. 13:3-4] Although Christian princes should be slow to kill if there is any other way to save sinners. Do I take away the authority of bishops to teach, correct, excommunicate, and the like? What laws of the Church do you cite to me here? Is it a law of the Church to cast anyone into vengeful flames? For the ancient bishops the extreme penalty was excommunication. Augustine pleaded with the imperial prefects not to put to death the Donatists who were more than heretics. They were seditious brigands. He assigned as his reason that some among them might be saved, and he showed that the obstinacy of the heretics is advantageous to the Church. He confesses also that many who err in [171] the faith are tolerated in the Church because they do not propagate their views. He does not object if God stirs up the minds of princes to the coercion of those who disturb the tranquillity of the Church. But who ever heard of orthodox bishops inciting kings to butcher heretics who were nothing more than heretics?

Augustine would not suffer a heretic who through lust of power or goods should enlist a following. If riots ensue and each side claims to be the Catholic Church, and the question has not been sufficiently aired, the prince should curb both sides. What shall hinder the prince from killing heretics who disturb the public peace, seeing that even the rulers of the Gentiles have this right as well as our own princes against the orthodox? The Emperor commands that heretics be punished, but he adds, those who are lawfully convicted and are obstinate. The task of the bishops, in so far as in them lies, is to teach, correct, and cure. What sort of bishop is he who can do nothing more than constrain, torture, and commit to the flames? If those who exercise this office are of the sort that Beda portrays in this book, if they have such a spirit of hate, such impudence, such zeal for calumny, such corrupt judgment that they would sooner drive ten men into heresy than reclaim one, can we say that the accused are accorded decent treat-

¹⁴ "In Matthaeeum homil. XLVI," Migne, PG LVIII, 477, PNF X, 289.

ment?

If I am not mistaken the inquisitor first singles out one against whom he has a grudge, lodges an accusation and secretly hurries the victim to prison where he is cross-examined on articles like those which Beda throws at me, some false, and some corrupt. If there is any discussion, it takes place in prison. If the accused mutter a defense, three picked monks are promptly called in to pronounce the final sentence. Where the theologian accuses, imprisons, prosecutes, and turns the victim over to the secular judge, and where the judge commits to the flames not on his own motion, but in accord with the sentence of the theologian, where the theologian acts as the [172] author and executor of the penalty, how much, I ask you, does this differ from the shedding of blood, especially if the motive be hate, ambition, or avarice?

Perhaps Beda is not the same in other matters as he is in this book. Nevertheless, I do know one whose name I spare because he has gone to his own place – I pity him if he receives from God, the Judge, the treatment which he has meted out to others.¹⁵ I say this not because I favor the heretics. I hate them if anyone does. I will not favor a milder treatment of one whom I know to be a heretic, that is, one who errs maliciously, who is factious and incurable. I do not urge clemency for heretics to the point that I become one myself. With Augustine I say, "I am able to be in error. I am not able to be a heretic." I have conducted myself in the present dissension so that both the Emperor and the Pope are persuaded of my sincerity, for both have thanked me, even though that which I did I could not have left undone without sin. The time may come when many will approve of my zeal and temper in this schism. The congeries of accusations assembled by Beda to the effect that I would tolerate any sort of criminal and other still more atrocious charges, these are mere calumnies. As a paraphraser I rendered the meaning of the Gospel in good faith. I did not digress from the footsteps of the ancient doctors, nor did I dare to add to the words of the evangelists the comment which Beda proposes. The discourse is conducted under the person of Christ. What appendix has the paraphraser a right to affix? Shall he add this: "Take up the tares, provided there is no danger to the wheat, and cast them into the fire?" Beda insists that this is what Christ meant, but this is precisely what He plainly forbade the servants to do. How nicely Beda's comment fits in, "provided there is no danger" Why, then, did the Lord himself say to wait until the harvest? And he himself identified the harvest with the end of the world. Why did he tell the servants not to do anything before the harvest? Why did he give the reason for his prohibition? What are the angels to do if in the meantime the heretics have been removed by the servants? unless perhaps Beda would apply to all criminals a passage which I have expressly restricted to false prophets and heretics.

But the Church, he says, does otherwise now, and so also do the decrees of the popes. That has nothing to do with my paraphrase. Nor were these things said in the person of Erasmus, but in the person of Christ, nor of the present time, but of that in which the infant Church was planted by the martyrs and watered by blood. Nor was the parable addressed to the multitude, nor to princes, but to a select group of disciples to whom it was given to know the mystery of the kingdom.¹⁶ Then Beda calumniously treats these words as if they were uttered by me, as if I taught that heretics should not be punished.

Nor, in the meantime, does he distinguish between ecclesiastical censures and capital pun-

¹⁵ The reference is probably to Erasmus's troublesome opponent, the inquisitor Nicholas Baechem of Egmont (Emondanus), who died Aug. 23/24, 1526.

¹⁶ Mark 4: 11; Matt. 13: 11; Luke 8: 10.

ishment inflicted by civil law. Quite irrelevantly he appeals to the decree in Deuteronomy [13] on putting the prophet to death, as if the Church now wielded both swords. The Gospel says, "Tell it unto the Church, but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican," as if there were any mention here of burning at the stake. The disciples were commanded to avoid, not to burn. Again the Apostle says, "After the first and second admonition, reject." [Titus 3:10] Is to reject the same as to cast into the fire? Again he says, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." [1 Cor. 5:13] Does "put away" mean to kill? If this had been done he would not in the Second Epistle to these same Corinthians have commended the man who was corrected."...

[174]... At this point they chant to us the celebrated dictum, "Repel force with force."¹⁷ How much more should this saying be celebrated among theologians at least, "Resist not evil," [Matt. 5:29] and "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves"? [Rom. 12:19] In all of the passages cited by Beda in favor of his opinion from St. Augustine, and which we have thus far passed over, there is no mention of killing, only of punishment. The Donatists were punished by the transfer of their ecclesiastical property to the Catholics and by the exile of those who disturbed the public peace. I might examine Augustine's letter to Count Boniface¹⁸ where many arguments are used which if understood with reference to capital punishment would require us to force the Turks and the Jews to the faith by the fear of death. That this was not the opinion of Augustine appears from his statement that the tractable are to be recalled, the intractable first cowed, then instructed. He adduces the example of Paul who was thrown to the ground, then commanded to go to Ananias. Who can teach those who have been killed? Who can raise up the slain? In the Epistle to Marcellinus, which is the 157th, he sings a song vastly different from that taught by Beda. With great solicitude he pleads that those who had committed crimes worthy of death against Christians, should be punished with some penalty other than death. His words read in part: "If the Count is not persuaded [175] by my letters let him at least grant that the culprits be kept in prison until we have time to petition the Emperor, lest the sufferings of the servants of God, which should be glorious in the Church, be sullied by the blood of their enemies. I know that in the case of the clergy in the valley of Anaunia, who were killed by the pagans and are now honored as martyrs, the Emperor readily granted the petition that there be no retaliation in kind upon the murderers, who were caught and imprisoned."¹⁹ Did, then, Augustine, who would spare the Donatist assassins, Augustine, who thought that the honor of the martyrs of God was stained by the blood of their enemies, did he think that the simple heretic, even though obstinate, should be burned in the flames?

[Castellio closes at just the right point.²⁰ Erasmus continues. "However, I neither urge nor discourage princes from butchering heretics. I am talking about the office of an ecclesiastic. . . . Beda's reiterated accusation, that I agree with the ancient heretics and the modern Lutherans that heretics are not to be punished, is an unwarranted statement and a manifest calumny. I never thought or taught this. In my paraphrase I was giving not my opinion but that of Christ... Beda could have maintained the papal constitutions without blasphemy against Christ, insult to the holy doctors of the Church, and calumny of a neighbor, had he referred the parable to apostolic men, that is, to those administrators of the Church whose office it is to cure souls not to take life. The parable, moreover, applies more particularly to

¹⁷ A German proverb which Erasmus discussed in his *Adages*. (EMC)

¹⁸ Letter 185.

¹⁹ Letter 139.

²⁰ Bainton's comment. (EMC)

the early days, when the Church was subject to pagan rulers and did not as yet enjoy the right to shed blood, but according to the dispensation of God was exercised and strengthened by persecutions, afflictions, and deaths, by the attacks of princes and heretics. This interpretation I think is true and sound, and I followed it in my paraphrase. In this way Beda could have harmonized his comment with the constitutions of the Roman pontiffs, but he passed this over in order to find room for calumny, and what the Lord said in former times to a handful of select apostles, instructing them against the adverse -storms to be raised by the heretics, this Beda imagines Erasmus saying to the Lutherans, that I may condone them."]

The Same Erasmus in His Reply to the Inquisition

[The objection of the monks reads: "In the *Paraphrase on Matthew XIII*," Erasmus has said that "the servants are those who wish to root out the tares before the time, that is, those who think that false prophets and heretics should be removed before the time by sword and death, whereas the householder desires that they be not rooted out, but tolerated, if perchance they may repent and from tares be turned into wheat, and if they do not repent, let them be reserved for their Judge to whom they will some day pay the penalty."

Erasmus, in his reply, says that he has sufficiently explained himself on this point in his replies to Beda and Latomus, and there is no need to repeat. Castellio picks up the reply at this point.]²¹

As often as I consider within myself how execrable are heresy and schism I cannot condemn the cautery of the law, however severe. Yet again, when I reflect with what mercy Christ planted, nourished, advanced, and established his Church throughout the centuries, I scarcely see how I can approve of the example of those who today, on account of scholastic opinions, drag men to prison and the stake, as now we see priests burned because they would rather call a girl with whom they live a wife than a concubine. Such priests I mean to cure, not to condone. The reproach that I wish them to escape with impunity is not applicable here. I merely wonder whether such severity comports with the mercy of the Church. It is not for me to approve or disapprove of the laws of secular princes. They have their justice and their councils; they have their judge to whom they shall render an account. My paraphrase explains the meaning of the parable in the Gospel. If the explanation is true and worthy of Christ and in accord with [177] the approved orthodox interpreters, why should it be rejected? Or if it is to be rejected, why are they not equally to be condemned?

Up to the time of Augustine, that is, more than four hundred years after the birth of Christ, we never read that the orthodox bishops besought the aid of the emperors against the heretics, although the heretics themselves frequently did so.²² Nevertheless the orthodox were unwilling to imitate their example until the headstrong, incurable, and utterly insufferable fury of the Donatists and Circumcellions drove them to it. In this case there was not only an unprecedented schism, but the Donatists even put out the eyes of the orthodox with lime and acid,²³ and some they killed and others they forced to commit homicide under threat of death. Nor were the schismatics kinder to themselves than to others, for they took their own

²¹ Bainton's comment. (EMC)

²² Bainton notes that this statement is not accurate, and discusses counterexamples in his Introduction, pp. 15, 19-21. (EMC)

²³ Augustine, Letter 88.

lives with the sword, or if swords were not available by leaping over precipices.²⁴ What more? Things had come to such a pass that the Donatists could not be suffered by any princes, pagan or Christian, even though neither heresy nor schism had been involved. Consequently when there was no tranquillity and no end of violence, the bishops agreed to ask the aid of the Emperor against the intolerable savagery of the Donatists. But the more merciful, among whom was Augustine, were displeased with this appeal to the secular authority in an ecclesiastical affair. Bishops, they thought, should use no arms save the Word of God and prayer and as a last resort anathema, that is, exclusion from communion. This was then the extreme penalty of the Church. Just as in legal parlance exile is called civil death, so among the apostles and their successors separation from the fellowship of the Church was capital punishment.

Not only the examples of Christ, the apostles, and the martyrs support this opinion, but even fear of the danger that if such severity be exercised, heretics will be replaced by feigned Christians to the [178] great detriment of the flock of Christ. But when the contrary opinion prevailed, and things quieted down, many having been corrected by severity who had been detained against their will in the Donatist camp, or had been in doubt or seduced by error, then Augustine strongly approved of the course which previously he had condemned. Nevertheless even against such furious brigands and assassins a law all too mild, in my judgment, was passed which touched the goods and life of no individual, but merely transferred the property of the heretical churches to the orthodox, and gave the Donatists the privilege of enjoying their former possessions if they would but transfer their membership. Such was the clemency that neither priests nor bishops, if repentant, were deprived of their station. A slight fine was imposed upon a small group of recalcitrants; but nothing was done about killing such beasts. When, then, for the first time an edict of the Prefect Marcellinus, if I recall,²⁵ seemed ambiguously to menace unrepentant heretics with death, Augustine vigorously admonished him not to inflict capital punishment, which was not authorized by the imperial constitution, and commended a later edict which cleared up the ambiguity... Likewise he admonished the Prefect Dulcinius²⁶ to behead no one. From these statements it is sufficiently evident how he shrank from this cruelty of confiscations, imprisonments, executions, and burnings, which now are all too pleasing to some and particularly to those who profess the perfection of Christian piety. They should seek to heal rather than to destroy and to mitigate the severity of the law by their intercession. But now these masters of mercy exceed the edicts of princes in cruelty.

[Castellio breaks off here.²⁷ Erasmus goes on to say that shifting the responsibility from the ecclesiastical to the civil authority is a mere subterfuge, since the civil proceeds at the instance of the ecclesiastical. Then comes a comparison between the severity of the present time in comparison with the comparative mildness of the days of Augustine and Theodosius. "I do not condemn the surgeon's knife, but I regret that the sins of Christians should have deserved so severe a remedy. I am grieved at the punishment of parricides, though I assuage my grief by the consideration of the public peace. I feel the same way toward those who cannot be cured, but must of necessity be removed lest they lead others to destruction; but although the law must perhaps of necessity be severe, certainly the office of priests and monks is to strive to save rather than to destroy." This point is further elaborated. Then Erasmus

²⁴ Augustine, Letter 185.

²⁵ The correct name is Marcellinus. See Augustine, Letters 133, 139.

²⁶ Letter 204.

²⁷ Bainton's comment, (EMC)

complains of the triviality of the doctrines for which men in his day were prosecuted. He turns back to the Theodosian Code and to the Decretals to show that not every error was subject to penalty, but only those of real moment. "But now a man is dragged to the flames if he doubt whether the Roman pontiff has authority over purgatory." Here Castellio takes up the thread (1057 D-E)].

Likewise a little further on: Formerly heretics, who were brought before a synod of bishops had the privilege of defending themselves. Those who were convicted had the option of pronouncing an anathema on their teaching or of being anathematized themselves along with their teaching, that is, excluded from communion. This was then the maximum penalty imposed by the Church. Berengarius [of Tours, d. 1088] who was accused not because of his opinion on the origin of confession or of purgatory, but because of his view of the truth of the body of Christ, was not constrained, even though after having been once dismissed he relapsed into the same error: But now monks disseminate unfounded rumors, and then drag suspects to prison where debate is conducted in monkish fashion. Articles are noted and fagots prepared. But all of this is irrelevant to my purpose though perhaps of some use to others... [180] ...Again a little later on: John Chrysostom, a godly man and most learned in the Scriptures, in his 47th Homily on Matthew 13 interprets the parable of the Lord to mean simply that heretics are not to be put to death, and assigns several reasons for this opinion. But lest anyone should suppose that he would grant heretics complete impunity, he adds this qualification, "The Lord," he says, "does not forbid us to restrain heretics, to stop their mouths and take away their freedom of speech, to break up their assemblies and societies; he forbids us to kill and slay."...

St. Jerome interpreted the rooting up of the tares as the separation of the heretics from the Church: "Lest," he says, "in pulling up the tares you root out the grain at the same time. Give room for repentance, and let us be advised not to cut off a brother hastily, for it may come about that he who today is depraved by noxious [181] doctrine may turn tomorrow and begin to defend the truth." At this point, Jerome modifies his assertion in view of the fact that Paul plainly taught and acted otherwise, since he advised not so much as to eat with a brother who is a fornicator or avaricious, and himself delivered some to Satan. [1 Cor. 5:11] Jerome says, therefore, that in a case of unmistakable error we should not cut off hastily, and where the matter is dubious, never, but should reserve the examination of such cases for the Lord. "Between the wheat and tares," he says, "while they are in the blade, there is a great likeness and either no difference, or one scarcely perceptible. For this reason the Lord says that in doubtful cases we should not pass hasty judgment, but should leave the decision to God, so that, when the day of judgment comes, He may eject from the company of the saints, not the suspicion of crime, but one manifestly guilty." This is Jerome's opinion...

[202]

JOHN CALVIN

Preface to the Acts of the Apostles

This contemplation alone [of the kingdom of Christ as exemplified in the book of Acts] will preserve us from the fate which, as experience abundantly shows, Ennius only too truly declared to overtake most men, that "Wisdom vanishes when force is introduced." For if the music of the flutes could so calm the warlike Spartans in the midst of the conflict, when even the mildest are stirred up above measure, how much more efficaciously should the kingdom of Christ excel through the celestial harmony of the Holy Spirit, whereby not only are wild beasts tamed, but wolves, lions, and bears turned into lambs, spears into pruning hooks, and swords into ploughshares? [Is. 11:6-8 and 2:4]

[203]

The Same John Calvin in the First Edition of the Institutes

Chapter II

Although ecclesiastical discipline does not permit familiarity and intimacy with the excommunicate, nevertheless we should try by every means, whether by exhortation and teaching, clemency and mildness, or by our prayers to God, to bring them to a better mind that they may return to the society and unity of the Church. Not only are they to be treated in this fashion, but even the Turks and the Saracens and other enemies of the true religion. Far be it that we should approve of the means which many have employed hitherto to force them to our faith by denying them fire and the common elements at all the offices of humanity and persecuting them with a sword and arms...

[206]

SAINT AUGUSTINE
Against the Grammarian Cresconius

Good Catholics are not pleased that even a heretic should be prosecuted to the death. . . . The faithful do not abandon the granary of Christ because of the tares, nor the threshing floor because of the chaff, nor the mansion of Christ because of vessels of dishonor, nor the nets of Christ on account of the bad fish.

On Faith and Works, Chapter V

[Augustine has been saying that some would tolerate no tares in the Church, others would exercise no ecclesiastical discipline.]

We think, indeed, that the sound course is to modify conduct and opinion in accord with the testimony of both sides, to tolerate the dogs in the Church on account of the peace of the Church, but not to give that which is holy to the dogs when the peace of the Church is secure...

In the 158th Letter to Marcellinus

With regard to the doubt entertained by your Excellency whether you should order the edicts to be published in Theoprepia, let this be done if the people can be assembled. Otherwise choose a more frequented spot, but by no means leave the matter undone. But I beg that the death penalty be not inflicted upon them, for the sake of both your conscience and Catholic clemency, no matter how great the crimes which they have confessed.

[207]

From the 159th Letter to Marcellinus

Christian Judge, fulfill the office of a good father. In your wrath against iniquity be mindful of humanity. Do not give way to the desire for vengeance against the atrocities of evildoers, but endeavor to cure the wounds of sinners. Do not give up the paternal diligence which you have thus far exercised during the trial in that you have extracted confessions of such crimes not by the wrack, nor the scraping iron, nor the flame, but only by the rod.

In the 150th Letter to Apringius

We have read what the Apostle says to you that you bear not the sword in vain and that you are a minister of God to punish those who do ill. But there is a difference between the civil and the ecclesiastical sphere; the one cultivates severity, the other mercy. If I were speaking to a non-Christian judge I should make a different appeal, though without deserting the cause of the Church, and insofar as he would let me, I should insist that the sufferings of the Catholic servants of God, which should be examples of patience, be not sullied by the blood of their enemies, and if he would not agree I should suspect him of resisting through evil intent. But now, indeed, that the case comes up before you, I have a different reason and a different approach. We see you in an exalted position, but we recognize in you a son of the Christian religion. Let your Sublimity bow, let your faith submit, etc.

**The Same from the Book of the Questions
on the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter XIII**

[The servants moreover said to him] : "Do you desire that we go and gather them?" Are those who are called servants here the same as those who a little further on are called the harvesters? Since in the explanation of the parable He calls the harvesters angels, and no one would venture to say that the angels did not [208] know who sowed the tares, or that the tares would be evident to the angels only after the grain appeared, for these reasons it is better to assume that the faithful servants in this passage are men, whom also He calls the good seed. We need not be surprised that He calls them both 'the good seed and the servants of the Father, just as He calls Himself both the door and the Good Shepherd, for the same thing is subject to diverse comparisons because of diverse meanings, especially because when He speaks to the servants He does not say, "In the time of the harvest I will say to you, 'Gather first the tares,' " but He says, "I will say to the harvesters." Whence we may infer that the office of collecting the tares to be burned belongs to another, and no son of the Church should think it his business.

In the Same Passage

Hence the servants ask, "Do you wish us to gather them?" Since the Truth Himself told them that man is so constituted in this life that he cannot tell how anyone now, in error may turn out in the future, nor how profitable the error may be to the good, for this reason such men are not to be deprived of life, lest in the attempt to destroy the evil, the good be killed, for they may prove to be good, and the good may suffer loss, since the bad may be of unintentional use to them. The weeding out may be done opportunely at the end, when no time remains for the improvement of life or the correction of opinion through comparison with the error of another.

Against the Letter of Manichaeus Called Fundamental

I have prayed and I do pray God Almighty, from whom and through whom and in whom are all things, that in refuting and conquering the heresy to which you Manichaeans adhere, perhaps more through imprudence than malice, He may give me a calm and tranquil mind, concerned rather for your correction than for your overthrow, for although the Lord by His servants overcomes [209] kingdoms of error, yet He commands that men, in so far as they are men, be corrected rather than destroyed.

SEBASTIAN CASTELLIO
In the Preface to the Bible, Dedicated to Edward VI

[The initial portion of the Preface, which is omitted in the *De haereticis*, is essential to the argument. The whole point is to show that there is much in Scripture which we do not understand and hence about which we should not persecute. One proof of our ignorance is the very fact of controversy. A further proof is that the predictions of the golden age in Scripture have not been fulfilled in the past, and are not being fulfilled in the present. This point is demonstrated in the first passage used in the *De haereticis*. The next omitted section argues that the fulfillment of the predictions must be reserved for the future. But the future cannot be known. The moral is that we should not pass hasty judgments, but should rather wait for further light. This point is elaborated in the second passage used in the *De haereticis*. The closing section of the Preface, omitted in our compilation, is merely a direct address to Edward VI, for whom the author wishes the clemency of Moses, the piety of David, and the wisdom of Solomon.]

Whence so many and such grave controversies which have not been composed during so many centuries, nor by so many disputations, controversies which have nearly always cost the blood of the weakest, while there is none who questions his own judgment, none who does not condemn others? We envy and revile and return not merely evil for evil, but often evil for good, and if anyone disagrees with us on a single point of religion we condemn him and pursue him to the corners of the earth with the dart of tongue and pen. We exercise cruelty with the sword, flame, and water and exterminate the destitute and defenseless. We declare that we are not allowed to kill anyone, yet we deliver men to Pilate and if he releases we say that he is no friend of Caesar.

[213] And what is vastly worse we declare that all this is done through zeal for Christ and at His command and in His name. Thus we cover the cruelty of the wolf with sheep's clothing. What a time! We are bloodthirsty through zeal for Christ, who, rather than shed blood, poured forth His own. Through zeal for Christ we pull up the tares, though He commanded that they be left until the harvest lest the wheat be uprooted. Through zeal for Christ we persecute, though He told us when struck upon the right cheek to turn the left. Through zeal for Christ we render evil, in spite of His precept to return good for evil.

And a little farther on: If there are controversies in religion and there are many, we should, I think, follow the example of Judas Maccabeus and his men, who, not knowing what to do with the altar of burnt offerings, "laid up its stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place until there should come a prophet to say what should be done with them." Or, better, let us follow Moses, who, although he had received an express command to kill anyone who transgressed the law, nevertheless, when a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, was unwilling to kill him without a special revelation on this point. [Num. 15:32-36] Yet Moses was a faithful servant of the Lord and singularly endowed with His Spirit. I need scarcely mention the advice of Gamaliel, who pointed out that if this "work be of men it will come to naught; but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." [Acts 5:38-39] And if we think that we are better informed than Moses, for in these days no one admits error, we ought certainly not to be both judges and accusers, but should rather obey Paul, who said, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations... Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own mas-

ter he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand... and why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why does thou set at naught the brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." [Rom. 14:1, 4, 10] Wherefore let us not judge one [214] another, for with what measure we judge we shall be judged. [Matt. 7:1-2] It were better, in my opinion to follow the Roman law on provisional status which reads like this: "If anyone who hitherto has been regarded as free is called into question by another and declared to be a slave, while the case is pending, he shall enjoy provisional freedom."²⁸ That is to say, he whose liberty is imperiled remains in the same condition of freedom until there is a judicial opinion as to whether he is slave or free. And rightly so, for in view of the doubt as to his condition, if it turn out that he was free, and in the meantime he had been treated as a slave, a grave injury would have been done to a free man. How much more does this principle apply in a capital case and especially in religion in which a sin is so serious. Let us wait for the sentence of the just judge and take pains not to condemn others, but rather look to ourselves that we may have no fear of condemnation. Let us obey the just and leave the tares until the harvest, lest by chance we root up the wheat through desiring to know more than the master, for the end of the world is not yet here and we are not the angels to whom this charge was committed. Add that it is absurd to wage spiritual war with earthly arms. The enemies of Christians are the vices which are to be cured by the virtues. Diseases are, to be healed by contrary remedies; learning must drive out ignorance; patience overcome injury; modesty resist pride; diligence oppose laziness; clemency fight against cruelty; and insincerity is to be laid low by a mind transparent, religious, pure, and devoted to God. These are the true arms and the true victories of the Christian religion. The office of the doctor is not to be committed to the executioner, nor the outside of the cup to be cleansed before the inside.

[215] This I say only with regard to religion; for when it comes to crimes, murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and the like, which God has commanded to be punished and for which He has prescribed the penalty, these are not called into controversy. God has spoken on these matters without obscurity and they pertain to the defense of the good, unless indeed we wish to have our throats cut in our beds, so depraved are the times. Nor is there any danger that the magistrate, who is ordained of God for the defense of the good, should in hanging a murderer put to death a good man. No one ever yet defended murder, not even the murderer. But the case of religion and of the knowledge of Sacred Scripture is altogether different, for the things contained in it are given obscurely and often in enigmas and inscrutable questions, which have been in dispute for more than a thousand years without any agreement, nor can there be agreement without love, which breaks and appeases all controversies and drives away ignorance. Yet for this cause the earth is filled with innocent blood. We ought certainly, however much we may think we know everything, we ought, I say, to fear lest in crucifying thieves justly, we crucify also Christ unjustly.

If we suffer Turks and Jews to live among us, the former of whom scarcely love Christ and the latter dearly hate him, and if we suffer detractors, the proud, envious, avaricious, immodest, drunkards, and like plagues, if we live with them, eat with them, and make merry with them, we ought at least to concede the right to breathe the common air to those who confess with us the same Christ and harm no one, who are indeed of such a temper that they would rather die than say or do anything other than that which they think they ought to say and do, not to mention the fact that of all men this sort is the least to be feared. He who would rather die than say what he does not feel (for he would sin if he did and the one who

²⁸ See Livy *Histories* III, 44-48, from which we learn that the law belonged to the twelve tables.

forces him, compels him to sin), I such a man, I believe, need not be feared as open to bribery and corruption. I venture to say that there are no persons who are more obedient to princes and magistrates than those who fear God in simplicity and obey Him to the extent of their knowledge. [216] The obedience of the others is feigned and will not outlast intimidation or ulterior appeals. He who is moved by his conscience to obey and who is taught by God "to be subject to the higher powers" [Rom. 13:1] even if they are unjust and how much more if they are just – the obedience of such a man is necessarily true and eternal, inasmuch as God, who is the cause of his obedience, remains true and eternal.

To come back to the point, this certainly is incontrovertible that he who judges too quickly makes haste to rue it. Many have been sorry to have judged, none to have deferred judgment, and he who is more inclined to clemency than to anger imitates the nature of God, who, though He knows us to be guilty, nevertheless postpones judgment and waits for us to correct our lives. He who kills hastily leaves no place for repentance and no time for amendment. If anyone dares to contradict these things he must confess that he strives to shed blood as we seek to staunch it. He will find out which cause is easier to maintain before God, the Judge. This I hold for certain that no one will regret clemency, patience, kindness, and obedience, whereas cruelty and rash judgments no one can but regret. And if the former road is perfectly safe and the latter full of peril, he is absolutely crazy who knowingly and willingly courts danger.

GEORGE KLEINBERG
On How Persecution Hurts the World

No one in his right mind doubts that our sins are the cause of the many calamities, discords, and wars with which the whole world today, especially Germany, is desolated. But few inquire as to the character of the sins which are the cause. I think they are cruelty and severity, and I will tell you why. God said, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," [Gen. 9: 6] for "in the image of God created He him." [Gen. 1:27] Christ said, "All that take the sword shall perish by the sword." [Matt. 26:52] James said, "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy." [James 2:13] There are [217] many such passages which show that blood should be punished by blood. Examples prove the same thing. Abimelech, with the aid of the Shechemites, killed his brothers and God requited this cruelty by the death of both parties. Because Saul, in his zeal for Israel, slew the Gibeonites a famine came upon the land for three years, nor could it be staid until the line of Saul was destroyed. The Israelites were delivered to their enemies because of cruelty to the prophets. Innumerable are the examples of this sort which show that God not only punishes the cruel, but also those who either rejoice, or do not lament, over this rage...

These things are all profitable for our instruction, that when we are afflicted with the same penalties, we may recognize the same causes. Had we not been guilty of carnage, one might suppose that the causes were different, but inasmuch as the bloodshed in our day has been so great that I doubt whether there was ever more, there can be no question but that we are afflicted for the same cause. I speak not only of the blood which has been shed in wars, for which also an answer must be given if it was unjustly done, but chiefly of that which has been shed for religion, which is of such a nature that it stems and staunches the flow of blood, for "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks." [Is. 2:4 and Micah 4:3] Wherefore I cannot see by what perverse human reasoning it has come to pass that scarcely any shed so much blood as those who profess to have the true religion.

I will pass over other nations and consider Germany alone. Here there have been so many changes of religion and so much human blood has been poured out that if [218] as many beasts had been killed men would lament. I have not much to say of lower Germany in which men have been drowned, not one by one nor two by two, but a hundred and a thousand at a time and even whole shiploads, and I dare not say (for the atrocity is almost incredible) that more than thirty thousand in about thirty years have been killed for religion at the command of one man. Other nations will scarcely believe this, but fires, swords, and seas are witnesses. If a prince had lost, I will not say so many horses, but even so many pigs, he would think that he had sustained great damage. What shall I say of the city of Munster in which, were we not blind as moles, we could see the evident displeasure of God with those who conduct religion by the sword.

From the cruelty first exercised against the Anabaptists arose a long succession of atrocities. They retaliated and slew many of their opponents. Thus blood was expiated by blood. Again the Anabaptists were miserably slain, even those who were not in arms, and what is still more cruel the suppression was carried on not only by the sword, but also in books which reach farther and last longer, or rather forever perpetuate this savagery.

Let it be understood that I do not defend homicides, adulterers, or other like criminals. I know that against such the magistrate has received the sword from God. But I am talking about the understanding of Scriptural passages, the sense of which is not yet clear. If they were not obscure, controversy would have ceased, for who is so demented that he would die for the denial

of the obvious? I am talking about errors. If there is any offense here it must be due to error and ignorance. Certainly profit, pleasure, and honor are not involved, but rather the contrary. For error and ignorance, men now in our time and regions are put to death by the sword and afterwards their memory is defamed in books far and wide and for all time to come.

He who does not deplore this, in my judgment, has not the heart of a man. God Himself seems to have manifested His displeasure against these murders in that the author of this policy, a learned man and famous throughout the world, shortly after he had put harmless folk to death, fell him [219] self with many others at the edge of the sword.²⁹ In the eyes of many good folk this was a judgment of God upon his sin. So manifest an example ought at least to move us, but I fear that some have hardened their hearts. They continue in the same way to spread books of cruelty, that is of burnings, through the world, so that there is no end of this slaughter until the Lord, at His coming, overtakes us gory, battered, and fat with the blood of our brothers, and until He sets us among the hypocrites. The very persons who at first reproached their adversaries for resorting to the sword because of inability to debate with the truth, now, grown powerful, adopt the methods of their opponents. Having first burned the persons and the books of their critics at a slow fire, they then tilt against the ashes and vanquish in death those whom they could not overcome in life. Against even the ashes of books they argue to their sweet will now that no one is left to contradict. A just judgment indeed is this, to kill a man before we know whether he ought to be killed and not to permit even his books to plead his cause, at least, not after his death. We reproach those who cut out the tongues of their victims, while we cut off life and books in order that we may not prove all things and hold fast that which is good. [Thess. 5:21] O heart of blood! O unheard-of cruelty! Who was ever so eager to save life as they are to destroy it? O Christ, O mighty God, O Father of the world to come! O Prince of Peace! O Light of the World! Enlighten the eyes of the princes that henceforth they may no longer serve the cruelty of Satan, but rather Thy mercy and meekness.

Princes and all rulers open your eyes, open your ears, fear God, and consider how you will render an account to Him of your administration. Many have been punished for cruelty, none for mercy. Many will be condemned in the last judgment for having killed the innocent, none for not having killed. Incline to the side of mercy, and do not obey those who incite you to murder. They will not help you when you give an account to God. They will have enough to do to look after themselves. Believe me, if Christ were here he would not advise you to kill [220] those who confess His name, however much they might err in certain respects, not to say that they merely seem to err.

Take counsel with the merciful, who advise you to leave the tares until the harvest [Matt. 13:30], for those who wish to pull them up before, eradicate also the command of Christ, who directs that they be left. Those who order heretics to be killed thereby forbid that homicides and other criminals be executed, although the law requires that they be put to death. If this is not so, explain what is meant by the "tares." If the heretics are the tares, they are not to be killed, but are to be left to the harvest. If, however, not the heretics are the tares, but rather the homicides and other criminals, then these are to be left until the harvest and not to be put to death, which is false, for if criminals were not executed the world could not endure. Either, then, the heretics or the criminals are to be left until the harvest. Hence it follows that he who wishes to kill heretics before the harvest is unwilling to kill criminals, and conversely, he who would kill criminals is unwilling to execute heretics, unless we repudiate the command of Christ to leave the tares.

²⁹ Castellio's reference is to Zwingli, the Protestant leader in Zurich, who had persecuted the Anabaptists and died in battle against the forces of the Catholic cantons in Switzerland in 1531 (EMC).

Wherefore, O Princes, do not heed those who counsel you to shed blood for religion. Do not serve as their hangmen. Believe me, if they were oppressed, they would advise otherwise, as indeed many of them did advise when they were suffering persecution, and as all true Christians always advise. St. Paul said that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." [II Tim. 3:12] Those who thus suffer will never advise others to persecute any more than did Christ and the apostles.

Be content with the sword which the Lord has given you. Punish brigands, punish traitors, false witnesses, and the like. But when it comes to religion protect the good from the injury of the bad. That is your office. The doctrine of theology cannot be de-fended by the sword. If theologians persuade you to defend their teaching by arms, the physician will have the right to ask that you defend his opinions against those of the other physicians, and likewise the dialectician, the orator, and the professors of the other [221] arts. If these arts cannot be maintained by the sword, neither can theology which consists no less than the others in words and in spirit. If a good physician can defend his opinions without the aid of the magistrate, why cannot the theologian do the like? Christ could, the apostles could; surely their disciples can. Defend bodies with the bodily sword. This sword cannot touch the soul.

Be wise and follow the counsel of Christ, not of Antichrist. Otherwise, I assure you, there will never be an end of seditions and wars, until all of you who have lightly shed blood shall miserably perish. Think not that the exercise of cruelty will eliminate seditions, for if cruelty went so far that only two men were left in the world and these two differed, they would destroy one another as did the Midianites of yore [Judges 7:22]. There is danger that the like recur today, if we do not moderate our rage. If cruelty were the cure, these evils would long ago have been removed, for cruelty has been exercised for more than five thousand years. But this is certain that evil will never be overcome with evil. There is no remedy against murders other than to stop committing murder.

The Same Author in His Book on Religion

Those who persecute because of religion do so for a variety of reasons; some through envy, like Cain who slew Abel because of his superior piety, and like the Scribes and Pharisees, who were envious of Christ; some persecute because of ambition, like these same Scribes and Pharisees, who hated Christ for disclosing their hypocrisy [Matt. 23]; some again are actuated by avarice, like these same persons who devoured widows' houses, [Mark 6:17-20; Matt. 14:3-12] and saw their gain gone through the exposure of Christ; or again, Demetrius, the silversmith, who persecuted Paul for doing away with the idols by the manufacture of which Demetrius made his living [Acts 19:23]; again, the motive may be voluptuousness, as in the case of Herodias, who hated John for preventing her adultery. [Mark 6:17-20; Matt. 14:3-12] Others are actuated by zeal for God conjoined with ignorance like St. Paul, who before he was a Christian thought to do God [222] a service in removing Christians from the world. [Acts 9; Gal. 1] For men of this sort Christ asked forgiveness, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." [Luke 23:34] Others sin through malice, and, what is worse, cover their envy, ambition, avarice, and luxury with the name of zeal, and by this spell bewitch the eyes of the people and perhaps even their own. The more these vices flourish the greater are the persecutions on account of religion. They will thrive especially in the last days when love is waxed cold and iniquities abound. [Matt. 24:12] Wherefore, there will be great persecution in the last times on account of these vices. If those who suffer persecution for the name of Christ are not the godly, then none are godly, as

Paul says, "All that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." [2 Tim. 3:12] If those who are killed as heretics are not martyrs (or at least some of them), then the Church has no martyrs: none were ever killed for Christ except with the title of heretic...

If Christians persecuted the wicked persons in the world on account of the faith, then Christians would reign in the world and the kingdom of Christ would be of this world. [cf. John 18:36] "Fear not little flock." [Luke 12:32] 'Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.' [Matt. 10:16] Will the little flock persecute the great herd, or the sheep the wolf?... "Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you." [Matt. 5:11] How then shall we be blessed if we persecute others? "If any man would come after me let him take up his cross." [Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23]

[223] How can we come after Christ if we crucify others? Shall we not be like the Jews who went after Christ not to be crucified with him, but to crucify him? Christ was crucified between two thieves. Therefore Christians will be held as thieves. Just as thieves take away the lives of men and are hated on that account, so Christians by word and example take away the life of the wicked, that is, their pleasures and desires without which they think life is not worth living.

The lioness pursues the wolf and the sheep. The wolf pursues the sheep, but not the lioness. The sheep is the last. It knows only how to suffer and help, not to hurt. There is nothing lower than the sheep. So it is among men. The great tyrants persecute the little tyrants and the Christians. The little tyrants persecute the Christians. The true Christian is the last. He is able only to help, not to hurt. There is none lower than he, for none is more humble than a Christian, more merciful, poor, and weak. In a word he is a worm, not a man, as David wrote of Jesus Christ. [Ps. 22:6] He who suffers persecution for the faith is either correct or mistaken. If he is correct he should not be harmed. If he is mistaken, he should be forgiven. If Christ asked pardon for those who crucified Him on the ground that they knew not what they did [Luke 23:34], how much more would He intercede for those who are ready to be crucified for Him? If the law of Moses pardons those who kill in ignorance [Lev. 4 & 5; Num. 15:24-29], how much more those who in ignorance are ready to be killed?

If someone found a stray sheep and brought it to your house supposing it to be yours, would you not love him for his good intent, even though it were not yours? If you who are so evil do this, what will God do? Will He not love those who with good intent defend that which they conceive to be true? If perchance they are wrong, will He not forgive them?

There are many other reasons which one might adduce in this matter, but these which we have given will content men of just judgment. The unreasonable are brought to sanity only by blows. [224] If anyone is so bloodthirsty, so drunk with the cup of Antichrist that he wishes to refute these reasons, let him see to it that he refute them all and refute them truly. There are hair-splitting malicious sophists who, in opposing the truth according to their trade, make the worse argument appear the better. The attention of the hearer is diverted to the weaker considerations, while the stronger are beclouded, omitted, or dismissed with a casual allusion as if already refuted or unworthy of refutation, or again the treatment is so obscure that no one understands. And finally to oppress the truth they draw on all the arts of the Aristotles and the Ciceros to throw dust in the eyes of the judges, as their master Cicero somewhere or other boasts that he did. Let them disabuse their minds. The perfect light, at its appearance, will dissipate these shadows. Though many should be killed and only three should remain, and wounded at that, yet would they storm and burn the fortresses and bring to light all the devices of the oppressors. Hypocrisy, drunk with the blood of the saints [Rev. 17:6], has already reigned long enough, her hour is at

hand.

Of one thing would I warn princes and peoples that they beware of the seditions and tumults which always accompany persecutions, as the following examples demonstrate. In the time of the Maccabees there were great and long wars because of the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, who molested the Jews because of their religion, nor could this evil cease until persecution ceased.

Later, in Jerusalem, there were very dangerous tumults because the Jews persecuted Christ. The like had not occurred before. The same thing happened in the time of St. Paul, who taught in Ephesus without disturbance until by persecution Demetrius the silversmith stirred up such a riot that the whole city was full of tumult. [Acts 19:23] Again, when the Jews persecuted Paul, who was making no disturbance in the temple, great tumults arose. [Acts 21:26] The same thing may be seen in our time. Wherever there are persecutions [225]everything is full of disturbance. On the contrary where there are no persecutions, everything is tranquil in spite of diversity of religion. I know some cities in which there are almost as many opinions as heads, but because there is no persecution, there is no sedition, and should persecution commence all would be in disturbance. At Constantinople there are Turks, there are Christians, and there are also Jews, three peoples widely differing from one another in religion. Nevertheless they live together in peace, which certainly they could not do if there were persecution. A careful investigation will reveal that persecutors have always been the cause of great troubles.

Wherefore, Princes and Magistrates, if you desire peace and tranquillity, do not listen to those who incite you to persecution, for they are seditious, however much they accuse others of sedition, as the Jews accused Christ, though they were themselves responsible. The dwelling of Christ must be built by love. The persecutors wish to build it by hate and blood. If you do not beware of them they will forever wipe out your kingdoms, republics, cities, souls, and bodies and will reduce you to that ruin and misery to which the Jewish people were brought by the persecutions and bloody counsels of the Scribes and Pharisees.