**PREFATORY ADDRESS TO KING FRANCIS I OF FRANCE**

For the Most Mighty and Illustrious Monarch, Francis, Most Christian King of the French, His Sovereign, John Calvin Craves Peace and Salvation in Christ.

1. CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE BOOK WAS FIRST WRITTEN

When I first set my hand to this work, nothing was farther from my mind, most glorious King, than to write something that might afterward be offered to Your Majesty. My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness. And I undertook this labor especially for our French countrymen, very many of whom I knew to be hungering and thirsting for Christ; but I saw very few who had been duly imbued with even a slight knowledge of him. The book itself witnesses that this was my intention, adapted as it is to a simple and, you may say, elementary form of teaching.

But I perceived that the fury of certain wicked persons has prevailed so far in your realm that there is no place in it for sound doctrine. Consequently, it seemed to me that I should be doing something worth-while if I both gave instruction to them and made confession before you with the same work. From this you may learn the nature of the doctrine against which those madmen burn with rage who today disturb your realm with fire and sword. And indeed I shall not fear to confess that here is contained almost the sum of that very doctrine which they shout must be punished by prison, exile, proscription, and fire, and be exterminated on land and sea. Indeed, I know with what horrible reports they have filled your ears and mind, to render our cause hateful as possible to you. But, as fits your clemency, you ought to weigh the fact that if it is sufficient merely to make accusation, then no innocence will remain either in words or in deeds.

Suppose anyone, to arouse hatred, pretends that this doctrine, an account of which I am trying to render to you, has long since been condemned both by the verdict of all estates and by many judgments of the courts. This will surely be saying nothing other than that it has in part been violently rejected by the partisanship and power of its opponents, and in part insidiously and fraudulently oppressed by their falsehoods, subtleties, and slanders. It is sheer violence that bloody sentences are meted out against this doctrine without a hearing; it is fraud that it is undeservedly charged with treason and villainy. So that no one may think we are wrongly complaining of these things, you can be our witness, most noble King, with how many lying slanders it is daily traduced in your presence. It is as if this doctrine looked to no other end than to wrest the scepters from the hands of kings, to cast down all courts and judgments, to subvert all orders and civil governments, to disrupt the peace and quiet of the people, to abolish all laws, to scatter all lordships and possessions—in short, to turn everything upside down! And yet you hear only a very small part of the accusation, for dreadful reports are being spread abroad among the people. If these were true, the whole world would rightly judge this doctrine and its authors worthy of a thousand fires and crosses. Who now can wonder that public hatred is aroused against it, when these most wicked accusations are believed? This is why all classes with one accord conspire to condemn us and our doctrine. Those who sit in judgment, seized with this feeling, pronounce as sentences the prejudices which they have brought from home. And they think they have duly discharged their office if they order to be brought to punishment no one not convicted either by his own confession or by sure testimony. But of what crime? Of this condemned doctrine, they say.

But with what right has it been condemned? Now, the very stronghold of their defense was not to disavow this very doctrine but to uphold it as true. Here even the right to whisper is cut off.

2. PLEA FOR THE PERSECUTED EVANGELICALS

For this reason, most invincible King, I not unjustly ask you to undertake a full inquiry into this case, which until now has been handled – we may even say, tossed about – with no order of law and with violent heat rather than judicial gravity. And do not think that I am here preparing my own personal defense, thereby to return safely to my native land. Even though I regard my country with as much natural affection as becomes me, as things now stand I do not much regret being excluded. Rather, I embrace the common cause of all believers, that of Christ himself – a cause completely torn and trampled in your realm today, lying, as it were, utterly forlorn, more through the tyranny of certain Pharisees than with your approval.

But here is not the place to tell how it has come about: certainly our cause lies afflicted. For ungodly men have so far prevailed that Christ’s truth, even if it is not driven away scattered and destroyed, still lies hidden, buried and inglorious. The poor little church has either been wasted with cruel slaughter or banished into exile, or so overwhelmed by threats and fears that it dare not even open its mouth. And yet, with their usual rage and madness, the ungodly continue to batter a wall already toppling and to complete the ruin toward which they have been striving. Meanwhile no one comes forward to defend the church against such furies. But any who wish to appear as greatly favoring truth feel that they should pardon the error and imprudence of ignorant men. For so speak moderate men, calling error and imprudence what they know is the most certain truth of God; calling untutored men those whose intelligence was not so despicable to Christ as to prevent him for bestowing upon them the mysteries of his heavenly wisdom! So ashamed are they all of the gospel!

It will then be for you, most serene King, not to close your ears or your mind to such just defense, especially when a very great question is at stake: how God’s glory may be kept safe on earth, how God’s truth may retain its place of honor, how Christ’s Kingdom may be kept in good repair among us. Worthy indeed is this matter of your hearing, worthy of your cognizance, worthy of your royal throne! Indeed, this consideration makes a true king: to recognize himself a minister of God in governing his kingdom. Now, that king who in ruling over his realm does not serve God’s glory exercises not kingly rule but brigandage. Furthermore, he is deceived who looks for enduring prosperity in his kingdom when it is not ruled by God’s scepter, that is, his Holy Word; for the heavenly oracle that proclaims that "where prophecy fails the people are scattered" [[Proverbs 29:18](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Prov%2029.18)] cannot lie. And contempt for our lowliness ought not to dissuade you from this endeavor. Indeed, we are quite aware of what mean and lowly little men we are. Before God, of course, we are miserable sinners; in men’s eyes most despised – if you will, the offscouring and refuse [cf. [1 Corinthians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Cor%204.13)] of the world, or anything viler that can be named. Thus, before God nothing remains for us to boast of, save his mercy [cf. [2 Corinthians 10:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%2010.17-18)], whereby we have been received into hope of eternal salvation through no merit of our own [cf. [Titus 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Titus%203.5)]; and before men nothing but our weakness [cf. [2 Corinthians 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%2011.30); [12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Corinthians%2012.5), [9](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Corinthians%2012.9)], which even to admit by a nod is to them the greatest dishonor. But our doctrine must tower unvanquished above all the glory and above all the might of the world, for it is not of us, but of the living God and his Christ whom the Father has appointed King to "rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth" [[Psalm 72:8](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Ps%2072.8); [72:7](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Psalm%2072.7), Vg.]. And he is so to rule as to smite the whole earth with its iron and brazen strength, with its gold and silver brilliance, shattering it with the rod of his mouth as an earthen vessel, just as the prophets have prophesied concerning the magnificence of his reign [[Daniel 2:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Dan%202.32-35); [Isaiah 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Isa%2011.4); [Psalm 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Ps%202.9), conflated]. Indeed, our adversaries cry out that we falsely make the Word of God our pretext, and wickedly corrupt it. By reading our confession you can judge according to your prudence not only how malicious a calumny but also what utter effrontery this is.

Yet we must say something here to arouse your zeal and attention, or at least to prepare the way for you to read our confession. When Paul wished all prophecy to be made to accord with the analogy of faith [[Romans 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%2012.6)], he set forth a very clear rule to test all interpretation of Scripture. Now, if our interpretation be measured by this rule of faith, victory is in our hands. For what is more consonant with faith than to recognize that we are naked of all virtue, in order to be clothed by God? That we are empty of all good, to be filled by him? That we are slaves of sin, to be freed by him? Blind, to be illumined by him? Lame, to be made straight by him? Weak, to be sustained by him? To take away from us all occasion for glorying, that he alone may stand forth gloriously and we glory in him [cf. [1 Corinthians 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Cor%201.31); [2 Corinthians 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%2010.17)]? When we say these and like things our adversaries interrupt and complain, that in this way we shall subvert some blind light of nature, imaginary preparations, free will, and works that merit eternal salvation, even with their supererogations. For they cannot bear that the whole praise and glory of all goodness, virtue, righteousness, and wisdom should rest with God. But we do not read of anyone being blamed for drinking too deeply of the fountain of living water [[John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/John%204.14)]. On the contrary, those have been harshly rebuked who "have dug for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" [[Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Jer%202.13)]. Besides, what is better and closer to faith than to feel assured that God will be a propitious Father where Christ is recognized as brother and propitiator? Than confidently to look for all happy and prosperous things from Him whose unspeakable love toward us went so far that "he … did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" [[Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%208.32)]? Than to repose in certain expectation of salvation and eternal life, when we meditate upon Christ, given by the Father, in whom such treasures are hidden? Here they seize upon us, and cry out that such certainty of trust is not free from arrogance and presumption. But as we ought to presume nothing of ourselves, so ought we to presume all things of God; nor are we stripped of vainglory for any other reason than to learn to glory in the Lord [cf. [2 Corinthians 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%2010.17); [1 Corinthians 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Cor%201.31); [Jeremiah 9:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Jer%209.23-24)].

What further? Examine briefly, most mighty King, all the parts of our case, and think us the most wicked of wicked men, unless you clearly find that "we toil and suffer reproach because we have our hope set on the living God" [[1 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Tim%204.10)]; because we believe that "this is eternal life: to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent" [[John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/John%2017.3) p.]. For the sake of this hope some of us are shackled with irons, some beaten with rods, some led about as laughingstocks, some proscribed, some most savagely tortured, some forced to flee. All of us are oppressed by poverty, cursed with dire execrations, wounded by slanders, and treated in most shameful ways.

Now look at our adversaries (I speak of the order of priests, at whose nod and will the others are hostile toward us ), and consider with me for a moment what zeal motivates them. They readily allow themselves and others to ignore, neglect, and despise the true religion, which has been handed down in the Scriptures, and which ought to have had a recognized place among all men. They think it of no concern what belief anyone holds or does not hold regarding God and Christ, if only he submit his mind with implicit faith (as they call it ) to the judgment of the church. The sight of God’s glory defiled with manifest blasphemies does not much trouble them, provided no one raises a finger against the primacy of the Apostolic See and against the authority of Holy Mother Church. Why, therefore, do they fight with such ferocity and bitterness for the Mass, purgatory, pilgrimages, and trifles of that sort, denying that there can be true godliness without a most explicit faith, so to speak, in such things, even though they prove nothing of them from God’s Word? Why? unless for them "their God is the belly" [[Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Phil%203.19)]; their kitchen their religion! If these are taken away, they believe that they will not be Christians, not even men! For, even though some glut themselves sumptuously while others gnaw upon meager crusts, still all live out of the same pot, a pot that without this fuel would not only grow cold but freeze through and through. Consequently, the one most concerned about his belly proves the sharpest contender for his faith. In fine, all men strive to one goal: to keep either their rule intact or their belly full. No one gives the slightest indication of sincere zeal.

3. CHARGES OF ANTAGONISTS REFUTED: NEWNESS, UNCERTAINTY; THE VALUE OF MIRACLES

Despite this, they do not cease to assail our doctrine and to reproach and defame it with names that render it hated or suspect. They call it "new" and "of recent birth." They reproach it as "doubtful and uncertain." They ask what miracles have confirmed it. They inquire whether it is right for it to prevail against the agreement of so many holy fathers and against most ancient custom. They urge us to acknowledge that it is schismatic because it wages war against the church, or that the church was lifeless during the many centuries in which no such thing was heard. Finally, they say that there is no need of many arguments, for one can judge by its fruits what it is, seeing that it has engendered such a heap of sects, so many seditious tumults, such great licentiousness. Indeed, it is very easy for them to revile a forsaken cause before the credulous and ignorant multitude. But if we too might speak in our turn, this bitterness which they licentiously and with impunity spew at us from swollen cheeks would subside.

First, by calling it "new" they do great wrong to God, whose Sacred Word does not deserve to be accused of novelty. Indeed, I do not at all doubt that it is new to them, since to them both Christ himself and his gospel are new. But he who knows that this preaching of Paul is ancient, that "Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification" [[Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%204.25) p.], will find nothing new among us.

That it has lain long unknown and buried is the fault of man’s impiety. Now when it is restored to us by God’s goodness, its claim to antiquity ought to be admitted at least by right of recovery.

The same ignorance leads them to regard it as doubtful and uncertain. This is precisely what the Lord complains of through his prophet, that "the ox knew its owner, and the ass its master’s crib; but his own people did not know him" [[Isaiah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Isa%201.3) p.]. But however they may jest about its uncertainty, if they had to seal their doctrine in their own blood, and at the expense of their own life, one could see how much it would mean to them. Quite the opposite is our assurance, which fears neither the terrors of death nor even God’s judgment seat.

In demanding miracles of us, they act dishonestly. For we are not forging some new gospel, but are retaining that very gospel whose truth all the miracles that Jesus Christ and his disciples ever wrought serve to confirm. But, compared with us, they have a strange power: even to this day they can confirm their faith by continual miracles! Instead they allege miracles which can disturb a mind otherwise at rest – they are so foolish and ridiculous, so vain and false! And yet, even if these were marvelous prodigies, they ought not to be of any moment against God’s truth, for God’s name ought to be always and everywhere hallowed, whether by miracles or by the natural order of things.

Perhaps this false hue could have been more dazzling if Scripture had not warned us concerning the legitimate purpose and use of miracles. For Mark teaches that those signs which attended the apostles’ preaching were set forth to confirm it [[Mark 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Mark%2016.20)]. In like manner, Luke relates that our "Lord … bore witness to the word of his grace," when these signs and wonders were done by the apostles’ hands [[Acts 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Acts%2014.3) p.]. Very much like this is that word of the apostle: that the salvation proclaimed by the gospel has been confirmed in the fact that "the Lord has attested it by signs and wonders and various mighty works [[Hebrews 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Heb%202.4) p.; cf. [Romans 15:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%2015.18-19)]. When we hear that these are the seals of the gospel, shall we turn them to the destruction of faith in the gospel? When we hear that they were appointed only to seal the truth, shall we employ them to confirm falsehoods? In the first place, it is right to investigate and examine that doctrine which, as the Evangelist says, is superior to miracles. Then, if it is approved, it may rightly be confirmed from miracles. Yet, if one does not tend to seek men’s glory but God’s [[John 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/John%207.18); [8:50](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/John%208.50)], this is a mark of true doctrine, as Christ says. Since Christ affirms this test of doctrine, miracles are wrongly valued that are applied to any other purpose than to glorify the name of the one God [[Deuteronomy 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Deut%2013.2) ff.]. And we may also fitly remember that Satan has his miracles, which, though they are deceitful tricks rather than true powers, are of such sort as to mislead the simple-minded and untutored [cf. [2 Thessalonians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Thess%202.9-10)]. Magicians and enchanters have always been noted for miracles. Idolatry has been nourished by wonderful miracles, yet these are not sufficient to sanction for us the superstition either of magicians or of idolaters.

The Donatists of old overwhelmed the simplicity of the multitude with this battering-ram: that they were mighty in miracles. We, therefore, now answer our adversaries as Augustine then answered the Donatists: the Lord made us wary of these miracle workers when he predicted that false prophets with lying signs and prodigies would come to draw even the elect (if possible ) into error [[Matthew 24:24](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Matt%2024.24)], And Paul warned that the reign of Antichrist would be "with all power, and signs and lying wonders" [[2 Thessalonians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Thess%202.9)]. But these miracles, they say, are done neither by idols, nor by magicians, nor by false prophets, but by the saints. As if we did not understand that to "disguise himself as an angel of light" [[2 Corinthians 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%2011.14)] is the craft of Satan! The Egyptians of old worshiped Jeremiah, who was buried in their land, rendering to him sacrifices and divine honors. Did they not misuse the holy prophet of God for idolatrous purposes? And yet, they thought that the curing of snake bite was a just reward for such veneration of his tomb. What shall we say except that it has always been, and ever will be, a very just punishment of God to "send to those" who have not received the love of truth "a strong delusion to make them believe a lie" [[2 Thessalonians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Thess%202.11)]?

Well, we are not entirely lacking in miracles, and these very certain and not subject to mockery. On the contrary, those "miracles" which our adversaries point to in their own support are sheer delusions of Satan, for they draw the people away from the true worship of their God to vanity [cf. [Deuteronomy 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Deut%2013.2) ff.].

4. MISLEADING CLAIM THAT THE CHURCH FATHERS OPPOSE THE REFORMATION TEACHING

Moreover, they unjustly set the ancient fathers against us (I mean the ancient writers of a better age of the church ) as if in them they had supporters of their own impiety. If the contest were to be determined by patristic authority, the tide of victory – to put it very modestly – would turn to our side. Now, these fathers have written many wise and excellent things. Still, what commonly happens to men has befallen them too, in some instances. For these so-called pious children of theirs, with all their sharpness of wit and judgment and spirit, worship only the faults and errors of the fathers. The good things that these fathers have written they either do not notice, or misrepresent or pervert. You might say that their only care is to gather dung amid gold. Then, with a frightful to-do, they overwhelm us as despisers and adversaries of the fathers! But we do not despise them; in fact, if it were to our present purpose, I could with no trouble at all prove that the greater part of what we are saying today meets their approval. Yet we are so versed in their writings as to remember always that all things are ours [[1 Corinthians 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Cor%203.21-22)], to serve us, not to lord it over us [[Luke 22:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Luke%2022.24-25)], and that we all belong to the one Christ [[1 Corinthians 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Cor%203.23)], whom we must obey in all things without exception [cf. [Colossians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Col%203.20)]. He who does not observe this distinction will have nothing certain in religion, inasmuch as these holy men were ignorant of many things, often disagreed among themselves, and sometimes even contradicted themselves. It is not without cause, they say, that Solomon bids us not to transgress the limits set by our fathers [[Proverbs 22:28](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Prov%2022.28)]. But the same rule does not apply to boundaries of fields, and to obedience of faith, which must be so disposed that "it forgets its people and its father’s house" [[Psalm 45:10](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Ps%2045.10) p.]. But if they love to allegorize so much, why do they not accept the apostles (rather than anyone else ) as the "fathers" who have set the landmarks that it is unlawful to remove [[Proverbs 22:28](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Prov%2022.28)]? Thus has Jerome interpreted this verse, and they have written his words into their canons. But if our opponents want to preserve the limits set by the fathers according to their understanding of them, why do they themselves transgress them so willfully as often as it suits them?

It was one of the fathers who said that our God neither drinks nor eats, and therefore has no need of plates or cups. Another, that sacred rites do not require gold, and those things not bought with gold do not please with gold. They therefore transgress this limit when in their ceremonies they take so much delight in gold, silver, ivory, marble, precious stones, and silks; and think that God is not rightly worshiped unless everything swims with untoward splendor, or, rather, mad excess.

It was a father who said that he freely ate meat on the day others abstained from it, because he was a Christian. They transgress the limits, therefore, when they execrate any person who has tasted of meat in Lent.

There were two fathers, one of whom said that a monk who does not labor with his hands must be considered equal to a thug, or (if you prefer ) a brigand; the second, that it is not lawful for monks to live off the goods of others, even though they be assiduous in contemplation, in prayer, and in study. They have also transgressed this limit when they have put the lazy, wine-cask bellies of monks in these stews and brothels to be crammed with substance of others.

It was a father who termed it a dreadful abomination to see an image either of Christ or of some saint painted in the churches of Christians. "What is reverenced is not to be depicted upon walls" was not the mere declaration of one man but the decree of an ecclesiastical council. They are far from remaining within these limits when they leave not a corner free of images. Another father counseled that, after having exercised in burial the office of humanity toward the dead, we should let them rest. They break these limits when they stir up perpetual solicitude for the dead.

It was one of the fathers, who testified that in the Eucharist the substance of bread and wine remained and did not cease to be, just as in Christ the Lord the substance and nature of man remained, joined to the divine nature. Therefore, they overstep the bounds in pretending that when the Lord’s words are repeated the substance of bread and wine ceases and is transubstantiated into body and blood.

They were fathers who, as they set forth only one Eucharist for the whole church and consequently excluded wicked and criminal persons, most gravely condemned all those who though present did not receive it. How far have they removed the boundaries when they fill not only churches but also private houses with their Masses, admitting anyone at all to observe them, each one the more willingly the more he pays, however impure and wicked he may be! They invite no one to faith in Christ and believing communion of the sacraments; rather, they put their work on sale, as the grace and merit of Christ.

There were two fathers, one of whom decreed that those content with participation in one kind, but abstaining from the other, were to be excluded entirely from participation in the Sacred Supper of Christ; the other strongly contends that one must not deny the blood of their Lord to Christian folk, who, in confessing him, are bidden to shed their own blood. They have removed these landmarks when they have commanded by an inviolable law the very thing that the former father punished by excommunication and the latter reproved with a valid reason.

It was a father who affirmed it rashness, when judging of some obscure matter, to take one side or another without clear and evident witness of Scripture. They forgot this limit when they established so many constitutions, canons, and doctrinal decisions, without any word of God. It was a father who reproached Montanus for, among other heresies, being the first to impose laws of fasting. They also passed far beyond those limits when they ordained fasts by very strict law.

It was a father who denied that marriage should be forbidden to the ministers of the church, and declared cohabitation with one’s wife to be chastity. And other fathers agreed with his opinion. By severely enjoining celibacy for their priests, they have gone beyond this limit. It was a father who deemed that one must listen to Christ alone, for Scripture says, "Hear him" [[Matthew 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Matt%2017.5)]; and that we need not be concerned about what others before us either said or did, but only about what Christ, who is the first of all, commanded. When they set over themselves and others any masters but Christ, they neither abode by this boundary nor permitted others to keep it. It was a father who contended that the church ought not to set itself above Christ, for he always judges truthfully, but ecclesiastical judges, like other men, are often mistaken. When this boundary is also broken through, they do not hesitate to declare that the whole authority of Scripture depends entirely upon the judgment of the church.

All the fathers with one heart have abhorred and with one voice have detested the fact that God’s Holy Word has been contaminated by the subtleties of sophists and involved in the squabbles of dialecticians. When they attempt nothing in life but to enshroud and obscure the simplicity of Scripture with endless contentions and worse than sophistic brawls, do they keep themselves within these borders? Why, if the fathers were now brought back to life, and heard such brawling art as these persons call speculative theology, there is nothing they would less suppose than that these folk were disputing about God! But my discourse would overflow its proper limit if I chose to review how wantonly they reject the yoke of the fathers, whose obedient children they wish to seem. Indeed, months and even years would not suffice me! Nevertheless they are of such craven and depraved impudence as to dare reproach us for not hesitating to pass beyond the ancient boundaries.

5. THE APPEAL TO "CUSTOM" AGAINST TRUTH

Even in their appeal to "custom" they accomplish nothing. To constrain us to yield to custom would be to treat us most unjustly. Indeed, if men’s judgments were right, custom should have been sought of good men. But it often happens far otherwise: what is seen being done by the many soon obtains the force of custom; while the affairs of men have scarcely ever been so well regulated that the better things pleased the majority. Therefore, the private vices of the many have often caused public error, or rather a general agreement on vices, which these good men now want to make law. Those with eyes can perceive it is not one sea of evils that has flooded the earth, but many dangerous plagues have invaded it, and everything is rushing headlong. Hence, one must either completely despair of human affairs or grapple with these great evils – or rather, forcibly quell them. And this remedy is rejected for no other reason save that we have long been accustomed to such evils. But, granting public error a place in the society of men, still in the Kingdom of God his eternal truth must alone be listened to and observed, a truth that cannot be dictated to by length of time, by long-standing custom, or by the conspiracy of men. In such manner Isaiah of old instructed God’s elect not to "call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy," "not" to "fear what they fear, nor be in dread" thereof, but rather to "hallow the Lord of Hosts and let him be their fear and dread" [[Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Isa%208.12-13)].

Now, then, let our adversaries throw at us as many examples as they wish, both of past and present ages. If we hallow the Lord of Hosts, we shall not be greatly afraid. Even though many ages may have agreed in like impiety, the Lord is strong to wreak vengeance, even to the third and fourth generation [[Numbers 14:18](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Num%2014.18); cf. [Exodus 20:4](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Exod%2020.4)]. Even though the whole world may conspire in the same wickedness, he has taught us by experience what is the end of those who sin with the multitude. This he did when he destroyed all mankind by the Flood, but kept Noah with his little family; and Noah by his faith, the faith of one man, condemned the whole world [[Genesis 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Gen%207.1); [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Heb%2011.7)]. To sum up, evil custom is nothing but a kind of public pestilence in which men do not perish the less though they fall with the multitude. Moreover, our opponents ought to have pondered what Cyprian somewhere says: that those who sin out of ignorance, even though they cannot clear themselves of all blame, may still seem somehow excusable; but they who stubbornly reject the truth offered them by God’s goodness have nothing to plead as an excuse.

6. ERRORS ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

By their double-horned argument they do not press us so hard that we are forced to admit either that the church has been lifeless for some time or that we are now in conflict with it. Surely the church of Christ has lived and will live so long as Christ reigns at the right hand of his Father. It is sustained by his hand; defended by his protection; and is kept safe through his power. For he will surely accomplish what he once promised: that he will be present with his own even to the end of the world [[Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Matt%2028.20)]. Against this church we now have no quarrel. For, of one accord with all believing folk, we worship and adore one God, and Christ the Lord [[1 Corinthians 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Cor%208.6)], as he has always been adored by all godly men. But they stray very far from the truth when they do not recognize the church unless they see it with their very eyes, and try to keep it within limits to which it cannot at all be confined.

Our controversy turns on these hinges: first, they contend that the form of the church is always apparent and observable. Secondly, they set this form in the see of the Roman Church and its hierarchy. We, on the contrary, affirm that the church can exist without any visible appearance, and that its appearance is not contained within that outward magnificence which they foolishly admire. Rather, it has quite another mark: namely, the pure preaching of God’s Word and the lawful administration of the sacraments. They rage if the church cannot always be pointed to with the finger. But among the Jewish people how often was it so deformed that no semblance of it remained? What form do we think it displayed when Elijah complained that he alone was left [[1 Kings 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Kings%2019.10), or [14](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Kings%2019.14)]? How long after Christ’s coming was it hidden without form? How often has it since that time been so oppressed by wars, seditions, and heresies that it did not shine forth at all? If they had lived at that time, would they have believed that any church existed? But Elijah heard that there still remained seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee before Baal. And we must not doubt that Christ has reigned on earth ever since he ascended into heaven. But if believers had then required some visible form, would they not have straightway lost courage? Indeed, Hilary considered it a great vice in his day that, being occupied with foolish reverence for the episcopal dignity, men did not realize what a deadly hydra lurked under such a mask. For he speaks in this way: "One thing I admonish you, beware of Antichrist. It is wrong that a love of walls has seized you; wrong that you venerate the church of God in roofs and buildings; wrong that beneath these you introduce the name of peace. Is there any doubt that Antichrist will have his seat in them? To my mind, mountains, woods, lakes, prisons, and chasms are safer. For, either abiding in or cast into them, the prophets prophesied."

Yet what does the world today venerate in its horned bishops but to imagine those whom it sees presiding over renowned cities to be holy prelates of religion? Away, therefore, with such a foolish appraisement! Rather, since the Lord alone "knows who are his" [[2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Tim%202.19)], let us leave to him the fact that he sometimes removes from men’s sight the external signs by which the church is known. That is, I confess, a dreadful visitation of God upon the earth. But if men’s impiety deserves it, why do we strive to oppose God’s just vengeance? In such a way the Lord of old punished men’s ingratitude. For, because they had refused to obey his truth and had extinguished his light, he allowed their blinded senses to be both deluded by foolish lies and plunged into profound darkness, so that no form of the true church remained. Meanwhile, he preserved his own children from extinction, though they are scattered and hidden in the midst of these errors and darkness. And this is no marvel: for he knew how to preserve them in the confusion of Babylon, and in the flame of the fiery furnace [Daniel, ch. 3].

Now I shall point out how dangerous is their desire to have the form of the church judged by some sort of vain pomp. This I shall sketch rather than explain at length lest I endlessly prolong my discourse. The pontiff of Rome, they say, who occupies the Apostolic See, and those who have been anointed and consecrated bishops by him, provided they are distinguished by miters and crosiers, represent the church, and must be taken for the church; therefore they cannot err. Why so? Because, they reply, they are pastors of the church and have been consecrated by the Lord. Were not Aaron and the other leaders of the people of Israel also pastors? Indeed, Aaron and his sons, though designated priests, still erred when they fashioned the calf [[Exodus 32:4](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Exod%2032.4)]. Why, according to this reasoning, would not those four hundred prophets who deceived Ahab [[1 Kings 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Kings%2022.12)] have represented the church? But the church was on the side of Micaiah, a single contemptible man, yet one who spoke the truth. Did not the prophets who rose up against Jeremiah, boasting that "the law could not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet" [[Jeremiah 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Jer%2018.18) p.], bear the name and face of the church? Against the whole tribe of the prophets, Jeremiah alone is sent from the Lord to announce that "the law was going to perish from the priest, counsel from the wise, the word from the prophet" [[Jeremiah 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Jer%2018.18); cf. ch. 4:9]. Was not such pomp manifested in that council where the priests, scribes, and Pharisees assembled to deliberate concerning the execution of Christ [[John 11:47](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/John%2011.47) if.]? Now let them go and cling to this outward mask – making Christ and all the prophets of God schismatics; Satan’s ministers, conversely, the organs of the Holy Spirit!

But if they speak from the heart, let them answer me in good faith: in what region or among what people do they think the church resided after Eugenius, by decree of the Council of Basel, was deposed from the pontificate and replaced by Amadeus? If they were to burst, they could not deny that the council was lawful as to its outward arrangements, and was summoned not only by one pope but by two. Eugenius was there condemned for schism, rebellion, and obstinacy, with the whole company of cardinals and bishops who had plotted the dissolution of the council with him. Nevertheless, subsequently supported by the favor of princes, he recovered his papal office unscathed. That election of Amadeus, duly solemnized by the authority of a general and holy council, went up in smoke, except that the aforesaid Amadeus was appeased by a cardinal’s hat, as a barking dog by a morsel. From these rebellious and obstinate heretics have come forth all future popes, cardinals, bishops, abbots, and priests. Here they must be stopped and held fast. For on which side will they bestow the name of church? Will they deny that the council was general, which lacked nothing of outward majesty, was solemnly convoked by two bulls, consecrated by the presiding legate of the Roman see, well ordered in every respect, and preserving the same dignity to the end? Will they admit that Eugenius and all his company, by whom they were consecrated, were schismatic? Let them, therefore, either define the form of the church in other terms, or we will adjudge them – however numerous they are – who knowingly and willingly have been ordained by heretics, to be schismatic. But if it had never been discovered before, they who under that fine title "church" have for so long superciliously hawked themselves to the world, even though they have been deadly plagues upon the church, can furnish us with abundant proof that the church is not bound up with outward pomp. I speak not concerning their morals and tragic misdeeds, with which their whole life swarms, since they speak of themselves as the Pharisees, who are to be heard but not imitated [[Matthew 23:3](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Matt%2023.3)]. If you will devote a little of your leisure to the reading of our words, you will unmistakably recognize that this, this very doctrine itself whereby they claim to be the church, is a deadly butchery of souls, a firebrand, a ruin, and a destruction of the church.

7. TUMULTS ALLEGED TO RESULT FROM REFORMATION PRECHING

Lastly, they do not act with sufficient candor when they invidiously recount how many disturbances, tumults, and contentions the preaching of our doctrine has drawn along with it, and what fruits it now produces among many. The blame for these evils is unjustly laid upon it, when this ought to have been imputed to Satan’s malice. Here is, as it were, a certain characteristic of the divine Word, that it never comes forth while Satan is at rest and sleeping. This is the surest and most trustworthy mark to distinguish it from lying doctrines, which readily present themselves, are received with attentive ears by all, and are listened to by an applauding world. Thus for some centuries during which everything was submerged in deep darkness, almost all mortals were the sport and jest of this lord of the world, and, not unlike some Sardanapalus, Satan lay idle and luxuriated in deep repose. For what else had he to do but jest and sport, in tranquil and peaceable possession of his kingdom? Yet when the light shining from on high in a measure shattered his darkness, when that "strong man" had troubled and assailed his kingdom [cf. [Luke 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Luke%2011.22)], he began to shake off his accustomed drowsiness and to take up arms. And first, indeed, he stirred up men to action that thereby he might violently oppress the dawning truth. And when this profited him nothing, he turned to stratagems: he aroused disagreements and dogmatic contentions through his catabaptists and other monstrous rascals in order to obscure and at last extinguish the truth. And now he persists in besieging it with both engines. With the violent hands of men he tries to uproot that true seed, and seeks (as much as lies in his power ) to choke it with his weeds, to prevent it from growing and bearing fruit. But all that is in vain, if we heed the Lord our monitor, who long since laid open Satan’s wiles before us, that he might not catch us unawares; and armed us with defenses firm enough against all his devices. Furthermore, how great is the malice that would ascribe to the very word of God itself the odium either of seditions, which wicked and rebellious men stir up against it, or of sects, which impostors excite, both of them in opposition to its teaching! Yet this is no new example. Elijah was asked if it was not he who was troubling Israel [[1 Kings 18:17](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Kings%2018.17)]. To the Jews, Christ was seditious [[Luke 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Luke%2023.5); [John 19:7](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/John%2019.7) ff.]. The charge of stirring up the people was laid against the apostles [[Acts 24:5](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Acts%2024.5) ff.]. What else are they doing who blame us today for all the disturbances, tumults, and contentions that boil up against us? Elijah taught us what we ought to reply to such charges: it is not we who either spread errors abroad or incite tumults; but it is they who contend against God’s power [[1 Kings 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Kings%2018.18)].

But as that one answer is enough to check their rashness, it is also sufficient to meet the foolishness of others who often happen to be moved by such scandals and, thus perturbed, to waver. In order not to give way under this perturbation and be driven from their ground, let them, however, know that the apostles in their day experienced the same things that are now happening to us. There were unlearned and unstable men who, to their own destruction, distorted things that had been divinely written by Paul, as Peter says [[2 Peter 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Pet%203.16)]. They were despisers of God who, when they heard that sin abounded that grace might more abound, immediately concluded: We shall remain in sin, that grace may abound" [cf. [Romans 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%206.1)]. When they heard that believers were not under the law, straightway they chirped: "We shall sin because we are not under the law, but under grace" [cf. [Romans 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%206.15)]. There were people who accused Paul of being a persuader to evil. Many false apostles were intruding themselves to destroy the churches that he had built [[1 Corinthians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Cor%201.10) ff.; [2 Corinthians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%202.3) ff.; [Galatians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Gal%201.6) ff.]. "Some preached the gospel out of envy and strife" [[Philippians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Phil%201.15) p.], "not sincerely," even maliciously, "thinking thereby to lay further weight upon his bonds" [[Philippians 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Phil%201.17) p.]. Elsewhere the gospel made little headway. "They all sought their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" [[Philippians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Phil%202.21)]. Others returned to themselves, as "dogs... to their vomit, and swine... to their wallowing in the mire" [[2 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Pet%202.22) p.]. Many degraded the freedom of the Spirit to the license of the flesh [[2 Peter 2:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Pet%202.18-19)]. Many brethren crept in by whom the godly were exposed to dangers [[2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%2011.3) ff.]. Among these very brethren various contentions broke out [Acts, chs. 6; 11: 15]. What were the apostles to do here? Ought they not to have dissembled for a time, or, rather, laid aside that gospel and deserted it because they saw that it was the seedbed of so many quarrels, the source of so many dangers, the occasion of so many scandals? Yet in tribulations of this sort they were helped by the thought that Christ is "a rock of offense, a stone of stumbling" [[Romans 9:33](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%209.33); cf. [1 Peter 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Pet%202.8); [Isaiah 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Isa%208.14)], "set for the fall and rising of many… and for a sign that is spoken against" [[Luke 2:34](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Luke%202.34)]. Armed with this assurance, they boldly advanced through all the dangers of tumults and offenses. It is fitting that we too be sustained by the same consideration, inasmuch as Paul testifies to this eternal character of the gospel, that "it may be a fragrance of death unto death" [[2 Corinthians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%202.15)] for those who perish; yet for us it was destined to this use: "to be a fragrance from life to life" [[2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/2%20Cor%202.16)], "and the power of God unto the salvation of believers" [[Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%201.16)]. This very thing we should certainly experience, if by our ungratefulness we did not corrupt this singular blessing of God and pervert to our ruin what ought for us to have been a unique assurance of salvation.

8. LET THE KING BEWARE OF ACTING ON FALSE CHARGES: THE INNOCENT AWAIT DIVINE VINDICATION

But I return to you, O King. May you be not at all moved by those vain accusations with which our adversaries are trying to inspire terror in you: that by this new gospel (for so they call it ) men strive and seek only after the opportunity for seditions and impunity for all crimes. "For our God is not author of division, but of peace" [[1 Corinthians 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20Cor%2014.33) p.]; and the Son of God is not "the minister of sin" [[Galatians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Gal%202.17)], for he has come to "destroy the devil’s works" [[1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/1%20John%203.8)].

And we are unjustly charged, too, with intentions of such a sort that we have never given the least suspicion of them. We are, I suppose, contriving the overthrow of kingdoms – we, from whom not one seditious word was ever heard; we, whose life when we lived under you was always acknowledged to be quiet and simple; we, who do not cease to pray for the full prosperity of yourself and your kingdom, although we are now fugitives from home! We are, I suppose, wildly chasing after wanton vices! Even though in our moral actions many things are blameworthy, nothing deserves such great reproach as this. And we have not, by God’s grace, profited so little by the gospel that our life may not be for these disparagers an example of chastity, generosity, mercy, continence, patience, modesty, and all other virtues. It is perfectly clear that we fear and worship God in very truth since we seek, not only in our life but in our death, that his name be hallowed [cf. [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Phil%201.20)]. And hatred itself has been compelled to bear witness to the innocence and civic uprightness of some of us upon whom the punishment of death was inflicted for that one thing which ought to have occasioned extraordinary praise. But if any persons raise a tumult under the pretext of the gospel – hitherto no such persons have been found in your realm – if any deck out the license of their own vices as the liberty of God’s grace – I have known very many of this sort – there are laws and legal penalties by which they may be severely restrained according to their deserts. Only let not the gospel of God be blasphemed in the meantime because of the wickedness of infamous men.

The wicked poison of our calumniators has, O King, in its many details, been sufficiently disclosed that you may not incline an ear credulous beyond measure to their slanders. I fear even that too many details have been included, since this preface has already grown almost to the size of a full-scale apology. In it I have not tried to formulate a defense, but merely to dispose your mind to give a hearing to the actual presentation of our case. Your mind is now indeed turned away and estranged from us, even inflamed, I may add, against us; but we trust that we can regain your favor, if in a quiet, composed mood you will once read this our confession, which we intend in lieu of a defense before Your Majesty. Suppose, however, the whisperings of the malevolent so fill your ears that the accused have no chance to speak for themselves, but those savage furies, while you connive at them, ever rage against us with imprisonings, scourgings, rackings, maimings, and burnings [cf. [Hebrews 11:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Heb%2011.36-37)]. Then we will be reduced to the last extremity even as sheep destined for the slaughter [[Isaiah 53:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Isa%2053.7-8); [Acts 8:33](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Acts%208.33)]. Yet this will so happen that "in our patience we may possess our souls" [[Luke 21:19](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Luke%2021.19) p.]; and may await the strong hand of the Lord, which will surely appear in due season, coming forth armed to deliver the poor from their affliction and also to punish their despisers, who now exult with such great assurance.

May the Lord, the King of Kings, establish your throne in righteousness [cf. [Proverbs 25:5](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Prov%2025.5)], and your dominion in equity, most illustrious King.

At Basel, on the 1st August, in the year 1536.