

Martin Luther's 1518 "Explanations" of the Ninety Five Theses (Luther's Works 31: 77-252) –
Part 1 of 2

Introduction

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Much of the 1518 treatise titled in English, "Explanations," is occupied with Luther's scholarly study of canon law. As such the contemporary reader enters a strange new world in reading it. But in his own day Luther sought to discover the origin of the extra-biblical practice of granting indulgences and to trace its historical evolution into the practice which he knows in his own times. He is motivated by the response of his own parishioners to the preaching of the "indulgence merchants." Today, he charges, the "simple" or "common" people understand purgatory as God's retributive justice extracting satisfaction for sin in the pains of sinners who will, nevertheless, be saved in the end. And they understand "plenary," or full indulgences, as a papal prerogative to remit these punishments by providing a compensatory satisfaction, so that "when a coin into the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs" (as John Tetzel actually preached).

Consequently, Luther's tedious (for us but not for his contemporaries) study of canon law showed that originally indulgences were freely granted by local churches for those penitents who had once apostatized under persecution. Normally, they were required to spend seven years demonstrating their repentance before being readmitted to the Eucharistic fellowship of the church – a rigorous practice to be sure. But the merciful church could also suspend its own disciplinary requirement ahead of time and end the period of exclusion. Such was the origin of indulgences. Indulgences were then administered locally, applied to genuine penitents living not dead, who were thus restored to ecclesiastical fellowship. The scholarly, historical and critical excavation Luther accomplished in the *Explanations* caused the scales to fall from the eyes of many readers who were taught and so thought that the pope possessed a quasi-divine "fullness of power" to cancel divine punishments whether not or the person were living or dead, penitent or not, in exchange for financial contributions –the traditional "alms-giving" component of repentance along with contrition (sorrow over sin) and fasting (bodily self-discipline).

There are many nuggets of pure gold for us to be found in the *Explanations*, but we can spare the would-be reader from the tedious work of hacking through the jungle of canon law and its interpretation that the scholar Luther executed for enlightenment in those days. Instead, I will provide page citations from Volume 31 of *Luther's Works* for those who would go there to study something mentioned in particular -- though I warn you that you will need time and a machete to make your way! Instead we will focus in this study on two shorter excerpts, the explanation of Thesis 7 this month, and of Theses 62-3 in November. In our introductions I will provide the necessary background for understanding them.

We can begin with something mentioned last time. Just as the aforementioned preoccupation with canon law also shows, the Luther of the Ninety-Five Theses was more "catholic" than the pope –not really a stretch in the case of the Florentine Medici, Leo X. Even though Luther praised Leo X in the *Explanations* as a "good" pope, the compliment was in pointed contrast to

his immediate predecessor, Julius II, the “warrior pope.” History has not been AS kind to Leo X, other than for his patronage of Renaissance art. Ludwig Pastor, the pre-Vatican II historian of the popes called Leo X’s papacy “a severe trial permitted by God to overtake Christendom” for Leo was “not equal to the serious duties of his high office;” he “never gave a serious thought to reform on the grand scale which had become necessary.” The “Roman Curia” remained “as worldly as ever” and Leo himself “was absorbed in politics and worldly pleasures... in amusements, music, the chase, and buffoonery.”¹

Be that as it may, in the 1518 *Explanations*, the Catholic monk Luther professes “certainty” about the existence of a post-mortem “purgatory” (126) even if he stresses the present experience of it in life-long repentance. He writes about true purgatory existentially as the feeling of dread, which works a spiritual purgation of desire (132, 153) until the penitent fully surrenders (134) to pure love of God, that is, love for God’s sake not one’s own (137). Such love for God is the goal (144-5) – Luther’s own goal as well!

As mentioned, throughout the *Explanations* the catholic Luther repeatedly honors the pope (145, 152, 162, 234, 247) and names him, Leo X (155) as a “good” pope (177). He also professes honor of the Virgin Mary and holds to the pious opinion of her immaculate conception (173). He grounds his entire argumentation in the doctrine of the venerable Catholic saint, Augustine and his doctrine of Christian love as greatest of all (184). He can speak of “Mother Church” (215) and point out that he has only dared to criticize the indulgence preachers because there is as yet no decided doctrine on the very obscure matter of indulgences. Thus his critique is put forward in expectation that someday a “general council” will convene to decide the church’s doctrine on this question (154, 174).

He argues throughout that “the pope is on my side” (117, 145, 169, 171-2, 196, 200, 204, 206-7, 209, 221, 244) –not the side of the “flatterers,” that is the “indulgence merchants” in Germany (151, 180-2, 187, 233) who maximize supposed papal power in order to credential their trafficking in indulgences. He positions himself as a true defender of a true pope, that is, a “general” bishop, a pastor of pastors and peoples. Thus, he explicitly rules out open defiance of the pope and he counsels external submission to his authority even if he should rule otherwise. Luther only allows for inward or conscientious resistance to false teaching which one must continue protest by withholding approval (234, 239, 246). It is to be noted that the catholic Luther thus sides with medieval conciliarism and its more modest doctrine of papal authority as a pastoral arrangement of local, that is, of the Latin speaking churches. Yet he emphatically affirms the papacy, so understood.

It is thus noteworthy that throughout the *Explanations* Luther remarks on his vocation as a theologian within this ecclesiastical arrangement. His duty is publically to withhold approval of false doctrine and rather to expose its falsity by rational critique. The opening preface to the *Explanations* is a brief but notable sketch of Luther’s understanding of theology as a churchly discipline resourced in the Holy Scriptures which distinguishes conscience-claiming articles of faith by probing them “on the basis of the judgment of reason and experience” (83).

Scripture is source and reason with experience is the method, and the task is to expose “mere opinions” and confirm articles of faith by “testing everything” (83, 146-7, 219). Repentance is an

¹ Ludwig Pastor, *History of the Popes*, Vol. 7, 3rd edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul and St Louis: Herder, 1950) 2-6.

article of faith. What does “repentance” mean? “[H]itherto many theologians have been permitted to corrupt almost the whole Scripture with their daring distinctions and double meanings recently fabricated...” But the theologian seeks and establishes “the true and real significance” of biblical words about repentance as a universal command and life-long vocation (87). The theologian’s duty is to attain such clarity (139) about what is to be believed, for this provides to faith certitude (122-3, 217). One who is unsure of what repentance means can hardly walk this arduous walk.

This clarity and certitude is not the result of simplistic proof-texting, however. The theologian asks and finds “good reasons” in demonstrating by reason and experience the clear meaning of Scripture as God’s conscience-claiming word (158-0, 167, 217, 250). This is so much the case that conscientious dissent cannot be silenced by fiat; it must receive and be persuaded by good reasons. The historian Martin Brecht emphasizes the “fundamental significance” of this point for Luther: if “opinions can no longer be expressed without danger, it is to be feared that the Inquisition will arbitrarily accuse people of heresy, while failing to pay attention to real heresies.”² Thus, one must give good reasons, which are rationally persuasive and experientially salient in establishing Christian doctrine and identifying deviations.

For Luther, of course, Christ as our righteousness is God’s good reason for the statements of Scripture that are clear and significant for establishing articles of faith that can and do bind consciences (210-11, 232). In making this argument in the *Explanations*, Luther appears as a humanist scholar, to be sure, opposing scholasticism as a method which puts logic before rhetoric (162, 237-8) and so misunderstands the language of Scripture. But as a theologian, Christ the savior who unites the penitent to His own cross to impart to her His resurrection life is the norm by which Scripture is rightly interpreted.

So the theology of the cross (225, 227) enters the controversy at just this theological juncture to argue that true penitents *welcome the cross* laid upon them by God just because *it conforms them to Christ*. Properly interpreted, canon law itself sees the difference between the *guilt* of sin, which God alone forgives by grace through the “merits” of Christ crucified, and the *punishment* due to sin. But further, for Luther the divine “punishment” which *is* the cross of Christ *laid on the believer* is salutary; God requires it for our *true* good, the Pauline “wasting away” of the old “outer nature” like the cocoon from which the new life of the butterfly will someday emerge.

That leaves only the temporal punishments required by civil or ecclesiastical authorities, which can be relaxed or enforced as practical judgment requires (103, 241). In this light, Luther reduces the practice of buying and selling indulgences in his day to virtual absurdity. Since true penitents welcome the cross that God lays upon them as divinely given for their ongoing purification, the kind of indulgences being sought and bought today are not for these true penitents but only for nominal Christians, “sluggards” (112, 151, 180-2, 187, 233) who fear God’s punishment but not their own sin. Such indulgences are actually “demeritorious” (150). They are works of the religion business (117), not the business of the Kingdom of God (206). They are sold as “simony” (201, 237 – cf. the figure of Simon in the Book of Acts who wanted to buy the Holy Spirit from Peter).

² Martin Brecht, Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521 trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993) 162

Luther reduces the business to absurdity also from this side. If the pope indeed had such power to release from divine punishment by the satisfaction provided in the surplus merit of the saints, and if divine punishment were cruel and retributive not fatherly and reparative, surely he would empty purgatory for free rather than for filthy lucre (166)! But true evangelical preaching does not magnify punishment to make auditors fear it and resort to the false comfort of purchased indulgences, but rather magnifies sin, so that penitent hate it (241) and finds true comfort in Christ crucified for us.

Thesis 7 of Luther's "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses" (LW 31: 98-107)

*God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him
submissive to his vicar, the priest.*

I maintain this thesis. And since it has been thoroughly approved by the consensus of everyone, it does not require further discussion and proof. Yet I am still trying to understand it and I shall voice my understanding of it in simple terms. This thesis maintains, along with the preceding thesis, that God does not remit guilt unless there is a prior remission by the priest, at least by desire, as the text clearly indicates: "Whatsoever you loose, etc." [Matt. 16:19]. And that passage in

Matt. 5[:24] says, "First go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift." And this, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" [Matt. 22:21]. And in the Lord's Prayer it says, "Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors" [Matt. 6:12]. In all these passages remission is indicated as taking place on earth before it takes place in heaven. One is right in asking how these things can take place before the infusion of grace, that is, before the remission of God, for man cannot have his guilt forgiven or the desire to seek remission without first of all having the grace of God which remits.

So it seems to me, and I declare: When God begins to justify a man, he first of all condemns him; him whom he wishes to raise up, he destroys; him whom he wishes to heal, he smites; and the one to whom he wishes to give life, he kills, as he says in I Kings 2 [I Sam. 2:6], and Deut. 32[:39], "I kill and I make alive, etc." He does this, however, when he destroys man and when he humbles and terrifies him into the knowledge of himself and of his sins, in order that the wretched sinner may say, "There is no health in my bones because of my sins; there is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation" [Ps. 38:3].

For thus do the mountains fall away before the face of the Lord. Thus does he send his arrows and scatter them, "at thy rebuke, O Lord, and at the breath of the spirit of thy wrath" [Ps. 18:15]. Thus sinners are turned to hell and their faces are filled with shame. David often experienced such consternation and trembling, as he confesses with groans in many different psalms. However, in this consternation is the beginning of salvation, for the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" [Ps. 111:10]. Nahum says that when the Lord cleanses, he makes no one innocent: "His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet" [Nah. 1:3]. Here his lightnings flash, the earth sees it and is moved; here his arrows fly and stick fast, the voice of his thunder rolls, that is, rolls all around, the waters see and tremble; here, in short, God works a strange work in order that he may work his own work. This is true contrition of heart and humility of spirit, the sacrifice most pleasing to God. Here is the sacrificial victim cut into pieces and the skin drawn and kindled for the burnt offering. And here (as they say) grace is infused, as Isa. 41[:3] says, "He pursues them and passes on safely." And in Isa. 66[:2]: "My spirit rests upon him, but only upon that one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." And in Isa. 38[:6] Hezekiah says, "O Lord, if in such things is the life of my spirit, restore me to health and make me live."

Actually man knows so little about his justification that he believes he is very near condemnation, and he looks upon this, not as infusion of grace but as a diffusion of the wrath of God upon him. Blessed is he, however, if he endures this trial, for just when he thinks he has been consumed, he shall arise as the

morning star. However, as long as he remains in this wretched, perplexed state of conscience, he has neither peace nor consolation, unless he flees to the power of the church and seeks solace and relief from his sins and wretchedness which he has uncovered through confession. For neither by his own counsel or his strength will he be able to find peace; in fact, his sadness will finally be turned into despair. When the priest sees such humility and anguish, he shall, with complete confidence in the power given him to show compassion, loose the penitent and declare him loosed, and thereby give peace to his conscience.

To be sure, the person who is to be absolved must guard himself very carefully from any doubt that God has remitted his sins, in order that he may find peace of heart. For if he is uncertain of the anguish of his conscience (as it must always be if it is a true sorrow), yet he is constrained to abide by the judgment of another, not at all on account of the prelate himself or his power, but on account of the word of Christ who cannot lie when he says, “Whatever you loose on earth” [Matt. 16:19]. For faith born of this word will bring peace of conscience, for it is according to this word that the priest shall loose. Whoever seeks peace in another way, for example, inwardly through experience, certainly seems to tempt God and desires to have peace in fact, rather than in faith. For you will have peace only as long as you believe in the word of that one who promised, “Whatever you loose, etc.” [Matt. 16:19]. Christ is our peace, but only through faith. But if anyone does not believe this word, even though he be pardoned a million times by the pope himself, even though he confess before the whole world, he shall never know inner peace.

This peace, therefore, is that sweetest power, for which, from the depth of our hearts, we ought to give the greatest thanks to God, who has given such power to men – that power which is the only consolation for sins and for wretched consciences, if only men will believe that which Christ has promised is true. Thus the question raised above is now clear, namely, that even if the remission of guilt takes place through the infusion of grace before the remission of the priest, this infusion is of such a nature and is so hidden under the form of wrath that man is not sure whether that grace is present or not; for the Scripture says, “accordingly his footprints are not recognized” [Ps. 77:19], and “by paths his feet have not trod” [Isa. 41:3].

So as a general rule we are not sure of the remission of guilt, except through the judgment of the priest, and not even through him unless you believe in Christ who has promised, “Whatever you shall loose, etc.” [Matt. 16:19]. Moreover, as long as we are uncertain, there is no remission, since there is not yet remission for us. Indeed, one would perish woefully unless it should become certain, for he would not believe that remission had taken place for him.

Thus Christ spoke to Simon, the leper, concerning Mary Magdalene, “Her sins...are forgiven” [Luke 7:47], by which he certainly indicated that she had already received grace. But she did not recognize this infusion of grace, since there was no peace in her bones because of her sins, until he turned to her and said, “Your sins are forgiven” [Luke 7:48]. “Your faith has saved you” [Luke 7:50], that faith, namely, by which she believed Him who forgave her sins. Therefore the words, “Go in peace” [Luke 7:50] followed. And the sins of the adulteress [John 8:3 -11] had already been forgiven before Christ raised her. But she did not recognize this, since there were so many accusers around her, until she heard the voice of the bridegroom who said, “Woman,...has no one condemned you?...Neither do I condemn you” [John 8:10,11]. And surely David, after he had sinned and, by the command of God, had been reprimanded by the prophet Nathan [II Sam. 12:1-15], would have been struck dead immediately, when, moved by the justifying grace of God, he cried out, “I have sinned” (for this is the voice of the righteous when they first accuse themselves), if Nathan had not pardoned him immediately by saying, “The Lord has also put away your sin, you shall not die” [II Sam. 12:13]. For why did he add, “You shall not die,” if it were not that he saw him overwhelmed by the terror of his sin and in despair? Hezekiah, also, when he heard that he was to die, would have died if he had not accepted comfort and the sign from Isaiah that he would enter the house of the Lord again [Isa. 38:4-8]; when he believed him he received at

the same time both peace and remission of sins, as he says: "You have cast all my sins behind you." And, generally speaking, how could those in the Old Testament have had any confidence in the mercy of God and in the remission of sins, if God had not shown them by revelations, inspirations, burnt offerings, providing a cloud, and other signs, that whatever they sacrificed was pleasing to him. And he desires to accomplish that same thing now by the word and judgment of the priests.

Therefore, God's remission effects grace, but the priest's remission brings peace, which is both the grace and gift of God, since it is faith in actual remission and grace. It is my opinion that this grace is what our teachers declare is conferred \pm efficaciously through the sacraments of the church. It is not, however, the first justifying grace which adults must have before the sacrament, but, as Rom. 1[:17] has it, "faith for faith." For one who approaches God must believe [Heb. 11:6]. But one who has been baptized must also believe that he had believed and approached properly, or else he shall never have that peace which is gotten only through faith. Therefore Peter did not loose before Christ did, but declared and disclosed the loosing by Christ. Whoever believes this confidently has truly obtained the peace and remission of God (that is, he is sure that he is pardoned), not by the certainty of the process but by the certainty of faith, according to the infallible word of the one who has mercifully promised, "Whatever you shall loose, etc." [Matt. 16:19]. Thus we read in Rom 5[:1] that, having been justified freely by his grace, we have peace with God through faith, certainly not through the process itself, etc.

But if I discern rightly and truly, then it is not wrong or improper to say, as my opponents want to say, that the pope remits guilt. Indeed, the remission of guilt is far better than the remission of any kind of punishment, though they preach only the latter and do so in such a manner that they make the remission of guilt of little significance in the church, while actually it is just the opposite. For when a man through the remission of guilt (which he cannot bestow upon himself, for no one should believe in himself unless he prefers to make two disorders out of one) has found peace through the acceptance of faith in absolution, every punishment is to him as no punishment at all. For anxiety of conscience makes the punishment harmful, but cheerfulness of conscience makes punishment desirable.

And we see that this understanding which the people have concerning the power of the keys is adequate when they seek and receive absolution in simple faith. But certain intellectuals, by their contritions, works, and confessions, endeavor to find peace for themselves but do nothing more than go from restlessness to restlessness because they trust in themselves and their works, while, if they feel torment of conscience, they should believe in Christ who says, "Whatever you shall loose, etc." [Matt. 16:19]. More recent theologians, however, contribute entirely too much to this torment of conscience by treating and teaching the sacrament of penance in such a way that people learn to trust in the delusion that it is possible to have their sins cancelled by their contritions and satisfactions. This most vain conceit can accomplish nothing more than it did for the woman in the Gospel who had a flow of blood and whose whole fortune was used up for doctors [Mark 5:25-34] so as to make the situation even worse. The people must first be taught faith in Christ, the gracious bestower of remission. Then they must be persuaded to despair of their own contrition and satisfaction so that, when they have been strengthened by confidence and joy of heart over the compassion of Christ, they finally may despise sin cheerfully, become contrite, and make satisfaction.

Also the jurists have given encouragement to that torture of conscience. In extolling the power of the pope they placed more value and awe upon the power of the pope than they did respect for the word of Christ in faith. People must be taught that if they really want to find peace for their consciences they should learn to place their confidence, not in the power of the pope, but in the word of Christ who gives the promise to the pope. For it is not because the pope grants it that you have anything, but you have it

because you believe that you receive it. You have only as much as you believe according to the promise of Christ.

Moreover, if the power of the keys would have no such value for peace of heart and remission of guilt, then, indeed (as some say) indulgences would be of little value. For what matter of great importance is conferred if remission of punishments is granted, since Christians ought to despise even death?

By the same token, why did Christ say, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven" [John 20:23], except that they are not forgiven to anyone unless he believes that they are forgiven for him through the remission of the priest? Thus the power is not conferred in the words, "If you forgive the sins of any," but in the words, "they are forgiven," the sinner is challenged to faith in the remission; just as the power is given in the words, "whatever you shall loose," and our faith is aroused in the words, "they shall be loosed." For Christ could have said, "If you forgive punishments or chastisements of any, you shall remit," if he wanted us to understand it that way. But he knew that conscience, already justified by grace, would by its own anxiety cast out grace if it had not been aided by faith in the presence of grace, through the ministry of the priest. Indeed the sin would have remained if he had not believed that it was remitted. For the remission of sin and the gift of grace are not enough; one must also believe that one's sin has been remitted. And this is the witness that the Spirit of God gives to our spirit, that we are children of God [Rom. 8:18]; for to be a child of God is so great a mystery (for he may appear to himself to be an enemy of God) that if one does not believe it to be so, it cannot be so. The Lord causes his saints to marvel in such a way that no one would have confidence in the one who justifies and heals him, if he did not believe that he was justified and healed; just as the sick man would not believe that the doctor cuts his body out of a desire to heal his infirmity, if he were not so persuaded by good friends.

Therefore I am not concerned whether the priest is a necessary cause for the remission of sins or whether there is some other cause, as long as it is somehow clear that the priest truly remits sins and guilt, just as a sick man's health is truly attributed to his friends because it was by their persuasion that the sick man believed in the doctor who operated on him.

This is not the place to consider the question, "What if the priest should err?" since that remission rests not upon the priest, but upon the word of Christ. So regardless of whether the priest should do it for the sake of money or honor, you should only desire remission without assuming anything, and should believe in Christ who promises it. Indeed, even if the priest should pardon you in a spirit of levity, nevertheless you shall obtain peace from your faith. When he also administers baptism or the eucharist, your faith receives the full benefit of the sacrament, regardless of whether he should seek money or be in a mood of levity and play. So great a matter is the word of Christ and man's faith in him. For we read in the history of the martyrs that a certain actor, in a spirit of jest and for the purpose of ridiculing baptism, desired to be baptized by his pagan companions and immediately crowned by them with martyrdom. Likewise when St. Athanasius was a boy, he baptized boys whom the bishop of Alexandria afterwards declared baptized, as recorded in church history. Indeed, St. Cyprian censured a peace bestowed rashly by a certain bishop, Therapius, but he wanted it to be approved. Therefore, we are justified by faith, and by faith also we receive peace, not by works, penance, or confessions.

With respect to my sixth and seventh theses, that ass of ours in lion's skin ⁶ triumphs with glory. Indeed he sings a hymn of victory over me before the victory is won, and from that bilge water of opinions ⁷ he draws another distinction between a satisfying and avenging punishment on the one hand, and a healing and curing punishment on the other, as if it were necessary to believe in people who dream up these things. Yet they very wisely conceal this distinction from the people. Otherwise indulgences, rather the money, would decrease if the people should realize that such trifling and useless avenging (that

is, fabricated) punishments were remitted. Then in order to show everybody that he does not know what is of the old or of the new priesthood, he introduces another obscurity of words and draws another distinction of the keys, namely, among those of authority, superiority, and office. So our illustrious masters, inquisitors of the inquisition and defenders of the Catholic faith, have learned nothing except what they have imbibed from the confusing and obsolete questions of the fourth book of the Sentences.⁷ Perhaps they wish that whatever Christ shall loose with the keys of superiority in heaven (for on earth he himself does not loose) shall be loosed by God in a “superheaven.” Then, in order that the pope may be God, some other higher God must be invented, who looses in the higher heaven whatever the pope has loosed with the keys of authority.

But away with such nonsense. We know of only one type of keys, namely, those which are given to earth. Now my opponents contend this: “He therefore errs who says that the priest of the new law looses only by confirmation and declaration.” That was the office of the Jewish priesthood. What sagacity of spirit and monstrous weight of erudition this is! And they are the ones who are considered most worthy to try heretics and defend the catholic faith, however against stones and sticks. How much more accurately did the Apostle Paul assert that the old priesthood consisted in judging lepers, the administration of justice, and purifications of the flesh, in food, drink, clothing and festival days, etc. Justification of spirit and purity of heart which Christ worked in the church by the ministry of the new priesthood were signified by these figures of speech. I have not advanced the sixth thesis enthusiastically, as I have mentioned, but for the sake of the feelings of others. These adversaries of mine and all their masters up to the present time cannot show how the priest remits guilt unless they do so by advancing that heretical but usual opinion which says that the sacraments of the new law give justifying grace to those who place no obstacle in the way. But it is impossible to proffer the sacrament in a salutary manner except to those who already believe and are just and worthy. The one who approaches the sacrament must believe [Heb. 11:6]. Therefore it is not the sacrament, but faith in the sacrament, that justifies. No matter what these arrogant sophists may chatter, it is much more plausible to say that the priest of the new law only declares and confirms the absolution of God, that is, points it out, and by this pointing out of his and by his judgment calms the conscience of the sinner, who is bound to believe and have peace by this judgment of the priest. In the same manner the priest of the old law calmed those whom he judged clean in body and clothing, though, he himself could make no one clean, not even himself. For what that does for the body, this does for the conscience. Just so does the spirit respond to the letter and the truth to the symbol. And I am waiting to see how those defenders of the catholic faith could explain the power of the keys in any other way, without becoming snarled in heresy.