



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 1. From the Reformation to the Thirty Years' War, 1500-1648

Protestants vs. Radicals – A Lutheran Defends the Rights of Rulers in Religious Matters (1530)

Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) was a Swabian follower of Luther and an important reformer in his own right. His *An Answer to the Memorandum on Whether Secular Government Has the Right to Wield the Sword in Matters of Faith*, reprinted below, attacked the anonymous pamphlet that contested the authority of temporal rulers in religious matters.

An Answer to the Memorandum That Deals With This Question: Whether Secular Government Has the Right to Wield the Sword in Matters of Faith [by Johannes Brenz, 8 May 1530]

First, it is true that the New Testament speaks of two kingdoms on earth, namely a spiritual kingdom and a secular kingdom, etc.

Second, it is also true that each kingdom has its own distinct king, sceptre, goal, and purpose, as the memorandum says.

Third, it is also true that it is not appropriate for secular government to protect true faith by force or by force to drive out and punish false faith, etc.

But it is unacceptable that the author of the memorandum makes no distinction between true or false faith on the one hand and the works and deeds of true or false faith on the other. Indeed, he mixes the two things together and concludes that because secular government has no authority to punish false faith, it has no authority to prevent or to punish the works or external deeds of that false faith either. For this conclusion follows from his own words where he maintains that every secular government is bound in conscience to tolerate in its territory the public assembly of every sect or faith, whether true or false, and at the same time to guarantee peaceful conditions for them.

But there is a great difference between these two things, true or false faith on the one hand and public behaviour based on true or false faith on the other, and if we carefully distinguish between the two and keep them separate, it will be clear what secular government may with good conscience prevent or hinder.

First of all, faith, whether true or false, is located in the heart. And since secular government is neither master nor lord of the human heart or conscience, it is in no way appropriate for government to undertake to punish or forcibly to prevent unbelief in the heart or conscience, as is known from the works of all the jurists.

But then this same faith produces an external confession, which is done with the mouth. And this confession, as long as it remains personal and merely reveals and displays the heart and mind of a solitary individual, and as long as it is not used to teach others or cause them to band together, is not subject to the authority of secular government. On the contrary, like faith in the heart, personal confession with the mouth should also be free and secure from governmental authority. And both things are in fact matters of faith, which should not be subject to any worldly power. For even though confession with the mouth is an external, public act, it is nevertheless so integrated with the faith of the heart that both are counted as the same thing, and when one says that faith should be free, everyone understands this to include the confession of that same faith.

But when it does not remain a matter of faith in the heart and confession with the mouth but rather goes to the point that people band together, whether in public or in private, and establish and begin a new teaching office, then it begins to be appropriate for secular government to intervene in such actions, and, if the assembly and teaching office appear to be useful and peaceful, to promote them, or, if there be good grounds for judging them to be damaging and unpeaceful, to check them.

And this I shall prove with the help of God: first from the Old Testament, and second, after having shown that the Old Testament is useful to the New, out of the New Testament. Third, [I shall prove this] with the words and opinions of the author of the memorandum himself, and also with other demonstrable reasons based on common sense.

[First.] In the thirteenth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy [Verses 1, 2, 5.] it is written: "If a prophet or a dreamer arises among you and gives you a sign" etc. "and says: Let us go after other gods and serve them," etc., "that prophet shall be put to death, so that you purge the evil from the midst of you."

In this decree it must be noticed first of all that it is not false faith or the mere personal confession of it that is abolished or punished but rather the teaching or preaching office, for the law does not say: Whoever believes falsely, but rather: "When a prophet says: Let us go after other gods." So among the Jews, too, false faith went unpunished and only the teaching or preaching office of a false faith was stopped.

In the second place, it is clear that among the Jews the administration and execution of this law was assigned to the kings, i.e., to the secular government. For when the Jews chose and anointed a king, the Levites placed into his hands a copy of this book of Deuteronomy, which contains the above-mentioned law, so that he might rule his kingdom according to its teachings and statutes. [See Deuteronomy 17:18-20.]

But it is said that the Old Testament no longer binds anyone and that if one is bound by one provision, one cannot avoid being bound by the others. It is true and certain that the Old Testament in and of itself no longer binds or constrains anyone. Nevertheless, as Paul testifies in 2 Tim. 3[:16], “all scripture” of the Old Testament “is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,” etc. Paul himself uses many passages from the Old Testament for purposes of teaching, namely in 1 Cor. 9[:1-12], where he teaches that the apostles should be provided with food and drink and that they, the apostles, by virtue of their office, have a right to food and drink, and cites as his authority the law of Moses, Deuteronomy 25[:4]: “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Might not someone have confronted Paul and said: My dear fellow, the Old Testament binds Christians not at all, as you yourself have preached, so your text proves nothing. Paul would certainly have replied as follows: I know very well that the letter of the Old Testament binds no one, but no one can on that account forbid me to cite something from it for purposes of doctrine and instruction. He does the same thing in 2 Cor. 13[:1], where he says: “This is the third time I am coming to you; in the mouth of two or three witnesses must everything be established.” Is this regulation not taken from Deuteronomy, chapter 17[:6]? [Probably Deut. 19:15.] Thus it is indeed true that the letter of the above-cited law about putting false prophets to death no longer binds any Christian government. On the other hand, because it was the case that among the Jews the execution of this law was assigned by divine ordinance to the secular magistrate, it follows that today one may properly extract from this a lesson for the Christian magistrate concerning his office, namely that he should seek just and appropriate means to curb false and damaging doctrine and worship among his subjects. Similarly, a preacher of the truth should draw from the same passage the lesson that it also behooves him, for himself and in his own way, to confront and curb false preaching among the people of his parish. And thus we have here instruction for both offices, for the secular magistrate and the preacher, each in its own appropriate way, the secular government with its secular penalties or restraints, and the preacher with his spiritual penalties and restraints.

But again it is said: A secular government could well draw from this law [i.e., Deuteronomy 13:1-2, 5.] the lesson that it would be justified in putting a false teacher to death rather than just expelling him from office or from the territory. What would be the outcome of that? Answer: The government cannot do this; for if it were to insist on the letter of the law in this instance, then it would be bound by all the other laws of Moses, as is correctly stated in the memorandum on the basis of St. Paul in Galatians 5[:3]. To avoid error, the government must draw its lesson from the intent and purpose of this law, which is ultimately that evil and disorder should be prevented. Can a government do that with fair words? In all likelihood it will only be able to do so by means of banishment from the territory, but surely only after all convenient, godly means to curb evil and disorder have been tried by the government. If evil and disorder are and can be prevented, by whatever means, without the penalty of bodily death, then that is enough to satisfy the intent and purpose of the law.

Second, there is proof of this in the New Testament, namely in St. Paul, 1 Tim. 2[:1-2]: “I exhort,” says Paul, “that first of all intercessions be made for kings and all governments, so that we may

lead a quiet and peaceable life.” Observe that it is incumbent on government to maintain a quiet and peaceable life among Christians. Now there is nothing that makes Christians more agitated and disquieted than the emergence among them of false preachers and separate sects. We are told that if two people were to quarrel and wrangle with one another over two cents, the government should intervene but that if, on the other hand, they were to quarrel with one another publicly from the pulpit over doctrinal matters and were not to keep it a matter of personal disagreement but were rather to awaken disquiet and confusion in the congregation, that the government should not intervene and restore peace by convenient, untyrannical means. It is true that the government cannot step in as a judge of doctrines, but it should step in as the judge of disorder and disunity, because it pertains to its office to maintain a quiet and peaceable life among its subjects.

Moreover, this is proved by the words of the author of the memorandum himself, for he writes as follows: “The secular government has been commanded to punish public crimes that it sees manifest in words and deeds” etc. But is it not a public crime if ten or twenty citizens in a town (where perhaps one or two thousand live) are peaceful members of the church and are content with the preacher that has been properly appointed by their government but then, over a period of four or six weeks, separate themselves and try to establish their own assembly and even, contrary to the order established by their government, to inaugurate a new preaching office? If they do not like the preacher who has been properly appointed by the government, they can still believe what they wish or move away. But to go beyond their personally chosen faith and to establish a new assembly and preaching office in a community that is not theirs to govern and in which they have no public authority, that is a public crime. And when the government intervenes, one cannot accuse it of attempting to control faith. Let everyone believe and confess for himself whatever he wishes, that is certainly no concern of the secular magistrate; but it does concern the magistrate when someone establishes a new sect¹ or a new preaching office without its permission.

Here someone might object and say: By this rule, the apostles should not have preached until they had been either called by the government or granted its permission. But since in fact they preached without the warrant of the government, often indeed contrary to governmental ban, they must, according to what was said above, have done wrong. Answer: It is certainly true, beyond question or doubt, that the apostles acted contrary to governmental ordinances. But one must ask whether their behaviour contrary to governmental fiat constituted a punishable crime. To be sure,

¹ Sometimes, as in the fourth paragraph of this memorandum and again in the last paragraph, Brenz uses the German word “sect,” the meaning of which is exactly rendered by the cognate English term. But here and in several other passages he uses the word “rotirung,” which is related to the verb “sich rotten” (to band together, usually for nefarious purposes). By so doing, he deliberately implies that those who form new sects are unruly and potentially dangerous people. These overtones of disorder and rebelliousness are not adequately conveyed by the word “sect.” On the other hand, if “sect” says too little, the standard English equivalents of “rotirung” (mob, gang, horde, rabble, etc.) all say too much and make Brenz’s rhetoric sound more lurid than it actually is. Thus, for want of a better term, “rotirung” has in all instances been translated as “sect.” [All footnotes taken from: *Whether Secular Government Has the Right to Wield the Sword in Matters of Faith. A Controversy in Nürnberg over Freedom of Worship and the Authority in Spiritual Matters*, translated by James M. Estes. Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1994, pp. 55-72.]

if one chooses to judge the matter according to external appearances, it is a crime, and it was proper for a pagan or a Jewish government, according to its pagan or Jewish faith, to examine the case. I do not say that it was proper for them to have a pagan or a Jewish faith. Indeed, the most appropriate course would have been for them to inquire into the true faith, acquire it, and adhere to it. But since they had always been of the Jewish or pagan faith, they did not do as they should have. But according to their faith they acted conscientiously and prudently when they took action against a new sect or preaching office established contrary to their faith. And I deem it a foolish and imprudent government, whatever faith it may adhere to, that heedlessly allows a new assembly contrary to its faith to arise among its subjects. But if it desires to act justly as well as prudently, it must first of all take the true faith to heart and then, so far as is appropriate to its office, promote that faith and keep it peaceful.

Now, with respect to the conduct of the apostles, it is true that they committed a crime against the government. But not every crime is sinful and punishable. Just as Moses and Phinehas committed murder but were not liable to punishment for it, [Exod. 2:11-15, Num. 25:7-13.] so the crime of the apostles was no sin, because they had been called to it by God and could publicly certify and prove their call with miracles, as though with letter and seal, to both Jews and pagans. So now, if a sect or preaching office springs up in some town or other outside the common order and contrary to governmental prohibition and those responsible want to establish their right to commit such a crime, then they are obliged to do so by performing public miracles. If they do not do that, then one is justified in judging their crime to be sinful and punishable.

But again someone might say: According to this rule the evangelical preachers committed a crime because they did not confirm their teaching with miracles. Answer: I am not speaking here of the doctrine, whatever its merits might be, but of the public teaching office and of the public or secret sect. Now, because the evangelical preachers have been duly called by the government and perform their calling and office in those places to which the government has summoned them and where the secular government permits an assembly, no one can accuse them of any crime and they do not need to perform any miracles, since they assumed their office lawfully. But they must take care that they are able to render account for their teaching. Just as a secular official who has been appointed to his office by the government does not need to account for his call to that office, for he was lawfully called to it (and the government knows that), but must render account for his conduct in office, so is it in the case of a preacher who has been duly called by the government.

But anyone who has unlawfully entered the preaching office must render account not only for his teaching but also for his call. If he cannot do this, he is guilty of a crime. And indeed, recent experience should have been sufficient to teach us that unlawful preaching, even if some truth be mixed in with it, leads to no good. When both peasants and scholars began some years ago to preach without call or appointment, that brought us the drama of the Peasants' Revolt.

And our memorandist admits this in his second memorandum,² where he says: “If a preacher attempts to preach where he does not have an appointment, then the government should restore peace” etc. Suppose then that in some place where there are no Anabaptists and no preacher, a few citizens adopt the Anabaptist faith and choose a preacher from among their number, who would say that this preacher had been lawfully called? For individual citizens or subjects have no authority to call a preacher; or if they have such authority, it is proper that they supply proof of it. But if they cannot publicly certify their authority, should not the lawful government have the power to curb their crime? If it has the power to prevent the formation of guilds where none exist, must it not also have the power to prevent the formation of a new religious group in its territory?

We are asked to accept that if it were to happen that in the space of one week an entire neighbourhood of people living in one particular street in a city converted from Christianity to Judaism and had themselves circumcised according to Jewish custom, the government would be obliged to allow them to build their own synagogue and to grant them the right to do everything according to the law of Moses. Who would be so mad as to recommend any such thing to a government?

It is another matter when subjects who adhere to two or three faiths accept and confirm government on the condition that it permit everyone the observance of his own religion, as the Jews accepted the Romans, and the Bohemians, so they say, accepted Ferdinand.³ Similarly, Joshua promised security to the Gibeonites and had to keep his word even though the Israelites had otherwise been commanded to extirpate all alien religions in the land of Canaan. However, as for allowing a new sect or teaching office to enter its territory, a government may well have reasons for doing so, as perhaps the authorities in Worms and Frankfurt have good grounds for tolerating the Jews. But I can find no reason why a government should be forced or compelled by virtue of its office to do any such thing, etc.

And in the ancient histories it is recorded that some emperors tolerated heretics alongside the Catholics. But it is also recorded that the Christian emperors who had always adhered to Christianity tolerated no heretical churches. Thus it is written in the *Historia Tripartita*,⁴ book 3, chapter 11 [1f.]: “The doctrine of Arius, although many had exalted it in disputations, nevertheless did not yet mark off a separate group that was known by the name of its founder, but rather all came together in the churches and took part there except for the Novitians and those who were called Phrygians and the Valentinians and the Marcionites and the Paulianists and whoever practised other heresies. Against all of these the emperor issued a decree commanding that their houses of prayer be taken from them, that they be forced into the churches, and that they hold no

² i.e., in his letter to Spengler.

³ In October 1526, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was elected King of Bohemia after having agreed to uphold the rights of the Estates, which included the right to adhere to any of several legally recognized religions.

⁴ The *Historia Ecclesiastica Tripartita*, compiled from the works of the Greek church historians Theodoretus, Socrates, and Sozomenus and translated into Latin at the instigation of the sixth-century Roman writer Cassiodorus. It covers the period A.D. 306–439.

assemblies either in private houses or in public” etc. Again, in the same *Historia*, book 9, chapter 7 [2f.]: “Emperors Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius to the people of the city of Constantinople. It is our will that all the peoples who live under our gracious rule abide in that religion” etc. Justinian included this mandate in his Codex under the title “Concerning the Most High Trinity and the Catholic Faith.”⁵ A parallel example of an imperial mandate is recorded in the same *Historia Tripartita*, book 9, chapter 10, and again in book 9, chapter 19 [16]: “The emperor decreed that the heretics were neither to have churches nor to teach concerning their faith nor to ordain bishops or others. Some of them were driven from the cities while others he allowed to remain there without honour or the benefits of citizenship. Moreover, he included in the same decree some cruel punishments against them which, however, were not enforced. For his aim was to move them to unity [with the orthodox] rather than to inflict suffering” etc. In the same book, chapter 25 [5]: “Hearing this, the emperor, amazed at his words and deeds, hastily published a law whereby the councils of the heretics were forbidden” etc. From this it is clear that the pious emperors intervened at various times in the assemblies of the heretics and forbade them. And, as far as I am aware, they were not on that account denounced as godless by any pious bishop, which would certainly have happened if the bishops had deemed their behaviour unjust and beyond the authority of secular government.

I must also briefly answer some of the claims and objections of the author of the memorandum. First of all, he says the following: “Nowhere does one find that the apostles, if someone did not adhere to their doctrine and preaching but rather believed or taught some other faith, appealed to the secular government” etc. It is true that the apostles did not invoke the secular government against those who believed falsely. Nor does any Christian preacher do so. I will go even further: the apostles never invoked a secular government against a thief or a murderer, and no true preacher does so either. But does it then follow that a true preacher may not advise the government concerning its office and, if it should come to that, instruct the government that it may with good conscience punish thieves and murderers and that it is indeed obligated to do so? Therefore, if it happens that a Christian government for conscience’ sake asks the preachers if it may with good conscience abolish in its territory the self-constituted assemblies and the self-appointed preachers of a competing faith, should it be tantamount to invoking the government if a preacher so asked instructs and teaches the government concerning its office? Paul teaches concerning government that is ordained of God to punish the wicked [Rom. 13:4.] and to enable its subjects to lead a quiet and peaceable life. [1 Tim. 2:2.] Should he on that account be accused of invoking the government against his opponents, who day and night sought to kill him? Far be it! Accordingly, there is a great difference between these two things: instructing a government concerning its office and petitioning or calling on the government for help and deliverance. The former pertains to all preachers, the latter to all subjects in dire, secular need.

To argue that one does not find in the New Testament that any secular government was praised on that account is pointless, for the argument from silence is invalid. Besides, neither does one find that any government was denounced for having refused to tolerate the assembly of a false

⁵ *Corpus juris civilis, Codex Iustinianus* 1.1.

faith. Moreover, at the time when the New Testament was written, governments were not Christian, so that no one could either praise or blame them on this account in any case.

Next, although Christ says in Matthew 13[:29-30] that one should not pull up the tares but let them grow, etc., that does not mean that one should remain quiet or do nothing but rather that in this passage Christ has set a limit to the apostolic office. He saw and noticed that his apostles were too inclined to resort to sword and fist, as was apparent in Luke 9[:54], when they wanted him to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, and also when Peter resisted with the sword while Christ was being taken prisoner. [Matt. 26:51.] Therefore he teaches them that their office does not extend to the use of the secular sword. Nevertheless, it is fitting that they should pull up the tares in manner appropriate to their office, for if it were not so, then no preacher could preach against heresy, and Paul would have behaved unjustly when he wrote against the circumcisers and other heretics. But does not writing or preaching against false faith or teaching constitute pulling up tares? It most certainly does! Just as it is fitting for a preacher to act according to the precepts of his calling, that is, by using the word of God, so it is also fitting for a secular government to do the same according to the principles of its office, i.e., each office does as befits it. Otherwise, according to this passage no secular government would be entitled to punish robbers, murderers, or blasphemers. Is not murder a tare? Are not blasphemy and public cursing tares? Is not adultery a tare? I gather then [from the memorandist's reading of the text] that the government would have to permit these tares to grow until the harvest and could not punish anyone for them. Consequently, Christ in this passage forbids the apostles to employ force in the conduct of their office, but at the same time leaves each office, both the spiritual and the secular, free to act according to the precepts and principles of its mandate and, to the extent possible, to pull up the tares.

It is indeed written that Christ will do battle in his kingdom. But if this is to be understood to mean that no one should do anything about the tares, then the preachers could preach nothing against them and ordinary Christians could not pray or cry out to God against them. But Christ does battle particularly when preachers cry out and Christians pray against the tares.

It is also written that almighty God rules in heaven and on earth. I suppose that one might conclude from this that secular government has no right to rule. That would be splendid logic! The truth is that when the preachers combat lies with the word of God and the secular government employs suitable means to combat all disorder, immorality, and dissension, then one can truly say that especially then Christ is doing battle and that almighty God is ruling through the preachers and the government as his appointed instruments.

It is true that Daniel says that the Antichrist will be destroyed "without hand." [Dan 8:25] But does he also write that therefore a Christian government must allow Antichrist's preaching or assembly to enter or move into its territory? No, he writes no such thing. So if a secular government refuses to permit any new preaching office or false faith to enter its territory, it does [not] thereby venture to destroy the Antichrist; it ventures, rather, to maintain quiet, peaceable, and harmonious conduct [1 Tim. 2:2.] among its subjects.

The Jews are also a part of the Antichrist. And because the Antichrist will be destroyed without hand, we are told that secular governments everywhere must admit the Jews and permit them to establish their synagogues and preaching office. But who would wish to compel them to do that? It is true that to take in the Jews is a work of mercy, but to grant them their own synagogue and teaching office, that is something that no one can impose or press upon the conscience of any government.

And further, it is true that certain words of Christ—those that he uttered to the man who asked him to make his brother divide an inheritance with him, and also those spoken to his disciples and to Pilate—prove that the two kingdoms must be distinguished. [Luke 12:13-14, John 18:36, Luke 22:25-26]. However, for the reasons cited above, one cannot conclude from this that a secular government must permit Sacramentarians,⁶ Anabaptists, Jews, Turks, or others of that nature to enter its territory and establish, among subjects living in external unity of faith, a new assembly and teaching office.

Moreover, a secular government must curb not only those things that by their nature cause tumult but also those that cause public scandal and offence. For example: to take two or three wives causes no tumult, as one can see among the Turks, who have many wives, and as we know from the Jews, who before the advent of Christ also had many wives. Should a government on that account not punish someone who takes two or three wives? And cursing: “[God’s] power and strength,” “Valentine and wounds,”⁷ as it is the custom to swear, these bring no public tumult either; should they on that account not be punished by the government? Therefore, even though the teaching office and the assembly of a false faith bring no tumult, they nevertheless cause confusion and disorder, as well as a discordant spirit, among Christians. Therefore, *quod non possit illorum affectus esse fidus quorum diversa est fides*,⁸ why should the government not be entitled to intervene in the matter?

The author of the memorandum believes that it would be appropriate for a secular government confidently to follow the advice of Gamaliel, who in Acts 5[:38-39] says: “If this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it” etc. That would perhaps be good, prudent, rational advice for a government that did not know which pot the barley was in and what the true and best faith was, and that also wanted to proceed too tyrannically. This was the case when Gamaliel spoke these words, for the scribes, overcome by the great miracles of the apostles, were filled with self-doubt and wanted only to slay and hang them. [Acts 4:13-16, 5:12-33] But in the case of a Christian government that has a faith well grounded in holy scripture, this would be dubious advice and would awaken the impression that it still vacillated in faith and was at loose ends.

⁶ i.e., Zwinglians.

⁷ i.e., “May St. Valentine’s plague [epilepsy] and [also] wounds befall you!”

⁸ “Because those who are divided in faith cannot have a faithful spirit.”

Nor does the speech of Gallio in Acts 18[:14-15] serve any purpose here, for as a heathen, Gallio had taken office on the condition that he respect the legal rights of the Jews. Since it is fitting that one do as one has promised, it follows that he acted prudently when in conformity with his accepted obligation he refused to exercise jurisdiction over the faith or the religious disputes of the Jews. But according to the author of the memorandum, Gallio must have acted imprudently, for in his second memorandum he says the following: "If a sect has dismissed a preacher or minister who nevertheless attempts to occupy and exercise his office in the place from which he has been dismissed, or if a preacher attempts to preach where he does not have an appointment, then the government should, on the complaint of the injured group, step in and restore peace" etc. Those are his words. But in Achaia the Jews had not called Paul as a preacher and for that reason they lodged a complaint against him with the government, as is reported in Acts 18[:12ff.]. But the proconsul, Gallio, refused to deal with the case or the complaint. According to our memorandist, he must thereby have behaved imprudently.

But it has already been said that it is one thing to permit entry to a new sect and quite another to condescend to maintain an old, well-established sect in external peace and grant it the exercise of its ancient rights and traditions, etc.

As for Abraham's reply to the rich man: "You have Moses and the prophets" etc., [Luke 16:29-31] a government can cite this against those who in private believe and personally confess a false faith, and it can also cite it against those who, contrary to its ban, begin a new sect and teaching office, namely as follows: We do not intend to punish you on account of your false faith and personal confession, for you have God's word as well as his teachers and preachers. If you refuse to hear them, our punishment will not help you in any way. But because you are presuming, without our command, to assemble with other people, and without our call to establish new preaching offices, we do on that account intend to punish you, etc.

The memorandist also says: "If a Christian government forbids false faith, it thereby gives governments that adhere to false doctrine a pretext for combatting the true faith" etc. The answer to this, as indicated above, is that here again no distinction is made between faith and the external works of faith, and also that it is true that no Christian government should curb a false faith or confession. But, as was said above, it may curb the assembly and the new public offices [of a false faith], and falsely believing governments are not thereby given leave to do injustice.

For it is entirely within the discretion of a government, whether it be of true or false faith, either to tolerate or to curb a new association, guild, or sect in its territory, entirely according to its good judgment, and it is under no constraint either way. If a government has a false faith and will not permit the assembly of true believers in its territory, that is, properly considered, wrong, as was in part indicated above. But by the standards of its false faith, such a government acts not imprudently or unjustly. They have zeal, but without knowledge, as Paul says. [Rom. 10:2.] Indeed, I would deem it a dissolute, wicked, and indolent government that, faced with something that in good conscience regarded as unjust and detrimental to its subjects, did not make every possible effort to curb the injustice. Such a government would certainly no more be forgiven by God for that

than was Brennus, duke of the Gauls, forgiven by God when his troops reviled and insulted Apollo, who was really only an idol but was deemed by them to be a real god, and robbed his temple.⁹ For God wants to be feared for his name's sake even among idolaters and he also wants to be feared in a false faith, and it is extremely blameworthy to act against one's conscience, dissolutely or wickedly, in either a true or a false faith.

And finally, even though, as the memorandist reminds us, there must be sects and divisions in the kingdom of Christ, [1 Cor. 11:19] it does not follow from this that one should not curb sects and divisions to the extent that it is possible and appropriate for each office. Were there not sects at Corinth, and were there not divisions there as well? But see how dauntlessly Paul resists them and how vehemently he scolds the Corinthians on that account. [1 Cor. 1:10-13.] But if sects and divisions absolutely must exist, then no one need resist them, neither preacher nor apostle. And where the memorandist says: "Why should a government presume to use the sword to drive from Christ's kingdom something that scripture says must necessarily be in it," one could just as well say in almost the same words: Why should a preacher presume to use the preached word to drive from Christ's kingdom something that scripture says must necessarily be in it, etc.?

But this verse of St. Paul [i.e., 1 Cor. 11:19.] is so to be understood that the mandate of the two offices, spiritual and secular, is not abrogated by it. Indeed, whoever is able to do so should resist sects and divisions: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." [Matt. 5:9.] Paul's intent in this verse [i.e., in 1 Cor. 11:19.] is to show what results from the devil's regime. For because the devil is the prince of this world [cf. John 16:11.] and goes about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour [1. Pet. 5:8], there must be quarrels and dissensions, in worldly matters as well as in those of faith, just as many are called but few are chosen. [Matt. 20:16 (ASV).] The result is that those who are peaceful and righteous will be made known. [1 Cor. 11:19.] Thus, it is neither just nor godly but rather forbidden by God to live in a quarrelsome and contentious way, even though the devil is still to some extent in power and such things must be, and even though the nature of the world is such that there must always be much evil. Nevertheless, it is the duty of a preacher to combat sects with the word of God. And it is the duty of secular government to prevent all public disorder and confusion, and it is not bound in conscience to permit the establishment of a new sect, synagogue, or public assembly to the detriment of true Christians, but may in good conscience resist the harmful undertaking of the new sect and abolish it by appropriate, moderate, untyrannical means etc.

Source of original German text: Johannes Brenz, *Frühschriften*, edited by Martin Brecht, Gerhard Schäfer, and Frieda Wolf. Volume 2. J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen, 1974, 528-41.

⁹ Brennus was the leader of a body of Gauls that had settled in Pannonia. Invading Greece in 279 B.C., he eventually set about the plunder of Delphi. His barbarian soldiers mocked the gods on the sacred hill, but their assault on the temple was frustrated by the skill of the defenders and also by a violent winter storm, which Greek and Roman historians attributed to the intervention of Apollo. Disgraced and wounded, Brennus committed suicide.

Source of English translation: *Whether Secular Government Has the Right to Wield the Sword in Matters of Faith. A Controversy in Nürnberg over Freedom of Worship and the Authority in Spiritual Matters*, translated by James M. Estes. Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1994, pp. 55-72.