

The Reformation Defined—The Diet of Augsburg (1530)

Abstract

The issues at stake in the religious schism were officially defined at the Diet of Augsburg (1530), the greatest Imperial assembly between 1495 and 1648. Charles V, recently crowned emperor by Pope Paul II, had returned to the Empire to settle, as he proposed, the schism through negotiations with the estates. He invited the Protestants to submit to him their articles of doctrine, to which his own theologians were then asked to respond. The Lutheran princes and cities submitted the Confession of Augsburg, which later became the definitive Lutheran statement of doctrine; two other (less regarded) statements came from Zwingli and a few South German cities. After much back and forth, the ensuing negotiations broke down, and the Diet dispersed, the parties having been hardened by the experience. A few months later, the Protestants decided to set aside the issues that divided them, and they agreed to form a defensive alliance. This led to the creation, in early 1531, of the Schmalkaldic League, which offered protection to the Protestants until Charles defeated them on the field in 1547. Before the conclusion of the Diet of Augsburg, the emperor and the majority Catholic estates signed a document (a “Recess”) that included the Diet’s decisions. Dated November 19, 1530, the Recess makes clear, among other things, that the emperor, his advisors, and the Catholic princes, spiritual and temporal, fully understood what was at stake in the schism with respect to doctrine, sacramental practice, ecclesiastical authority, and church property. In this sense, a straight line can be drawn from Charles’s exchange with Martin Luther at Worms in 1521 to the Recess of the Diet of Augsburg in 1530.

Source

Augsburg, November 19, 1530

We, Charles V, [...] announce and make known to all the following. At Our first Imperial Diet, held at Worms [1521], before We departed from the Holy Roman Empire in order to preserve our kingdom and land from ongoing wars and feuds, as many of you know, We were obliged to establish, with the advice, will, and consent of Ours and the Empire’s electors, princes, and estates, a sound law to defend Our holy Christian faith and law and order in the Holy Empire to the honor, good, welfare, improvement, and nurture of the German Nation. Since then We have been hearing, for some time, the grievous news that Our Imperial edict, which We issued at Worms, about the dispute over Our holy Christian faith, which in Our absence has spread and rooted itself in many dangerous sects that give rise to no little confusion and schism in Our common German nation. [...] And so, having issued several laws for keeping the subjects of Our Spanish kingdom united and peaceful during Our absence, and in view of Our special love for and inclination to the German Nation and the Holy Roman Empire, We have left Our hereditary Spanish kingdom for Italy. We were able, praise be to God, to restore peace and order to our Italian lands. [...] We called an Imperial Diet to convene in Ours and the Holy Empire’s city of Augsburg on April 8, it being Our conviction, will, and opinion to deal with affairs of the Holy Empire, the whole of Christendom, and the German Nation. Specifically, We wished [to determine] how the dispute and errors concerning Our holy faith and the Christian religion

[...] might be fruitfully dealt with and settled, and how the differences over the faith might be overcome; [we wished] to suppress enmity; to overcome the current misconceptions concerning Christ, Our sole Savior; to listen to, understand, and deal with every opinion and view with love and favor, and to bring each to and align each with Christian truth; to suppress everything that is incorrectly interpreted or taught by either side; to accept and stand by a true religion on behalf of us all. [...]

§ 1. Accordingly, We, together with Our electors, princes, prelates, counts, estates, and envoys, have taken in hand the disputed article about Our holy Christian faith [...] and have graciously offered to hear everyone who has something to bring forward concerning the religious dispute. This was done by Ours and the Holy Empire's electors, princes, and cities: Duke John of Saxony, Landgrave in Thuringia, Margrave of Meissen, and the Holy Roman Empire's hereditary Marshal and Elector; Margrave George of Brandenburg, Duke of Pomerania-Stettin and of Cashubians and Wends, Burggrave of Nuremberg and Prince of Rügen; Dukes Ernest and Francis, brothers, of Brunswick-Lüneburg; Landgrave Philip of Hesse; Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt; and the envoys of the cities of Nuremberg, Reutlingen, Kempten, Heilbronn, Windsheim, and Weissenburg im Nordgau.[1] They composed and submitted in writing their confession and opinion on the faith, which We graciously accepted from them and had read publicly in the presence of all electors, princes, and estates of the Holy Empire assembled here [on June 25, 1530].

And although, after solid advice from expert theologians and Biblical scholars from many nations, We refuted and rejected their confession on good grounds on the basis of the Holy Gospel and the Bible,[2] this did not persuade them to agree in all articles with Us, the electors, princes, and other estates. Whereupon, for the health and welfare of the Holy Empire and the German Nation, and so that peace and unity may be maintained, We now present out of Imperial good will and special grace the following favorable Recess to the aforementioned electors, princes, and six cities, requesting them to accept the same with good grace. Namely, that between now and April 15 of next year, they shall consider whether they wish to confess and make peace concerning the disputed articles with the Christian Church, His Holiness, Us, and the other electors, princes, and estates of the Holy Roman Empire, and other Christian rulers and subjects of the common Christendom until a future Council shall meet. They shall apprise Us of their attitude under their seals before this date.

§ 2. It is Our firm will, opinion, and command, that between now and the coming 15th day of April, the Elector of Saxony and his allies shall order that nothing new concerning the faith be printed, offered, or sold in their principalities, lands, and territories. Further, that all electors, princes, and estates of the Holy Empire shall meanwhile keep the peace and unity [of the Empire].

§ 3. Neither the Elector of Saxony, the five princes, the six cities, nor their subjects shall force their sect, as previously has happened, on Our subjects or those of the Holy Empire, or the other electors, princes, and estates. And if some subjects of the Elector of Saxony, the five princes, and the six cities, whatever status they may have, adhere to, or wish to adhere to, the old Christian faith, they shall not be disturbed in their churches and chapels or in their ceremonies and Masses, nor shall any further innovation be introduced in them. Nor shall the regular clergy, men or women, be in any way hindered from hearing the Mass, confessing their sins, or administering or receiving the blessed Sacrament.[3]

§ 4. Furthermore, the aforementioned Elector of Saxony, the five princes, and six cities join Us and the other electors, princes, and estates against those who deny the blessed Sacrament.[4] Further, rather than splitting away from Us, [...] they should advise, promote, and aid our actions against those people, just as, as mentioned above, all of Our electors, princes, and estates have, to the extent that they are involved, given us their approval and affirmation.

§ 5. Since no General Council has been held in the Christian Church for many years, although so many abuses and failings have afflicted Christendom for a long time, We, on the common advice [...] of Ours and the Holy Empire's electors, [etc.], have decided [...] to arrange with His Holiness and with all Christian kings and rulers as follows. Within six months of the rising of this Diet, a General Christian Council shall be called to a suitable meeting place for the purpose of Christian reformation. [...]

§ 6. Furthermore, though the laws of God and of man, also the Gospel, We command that no one shall be deprived by force of what is his [...]. We are daily approached with complaints and pleas from expelled abbots and abbesses who seek help in recovering their properties.

[...] It is therefore Our strict command that the Elector of Saxony and his allies immediately, and without delay, allow these expropriated monks and other clergy to reoccupy the monasteries and properties in their territories, from which the occupants have been expelled.

§ 7. The aforementioned Elector of Saxony and his allies have not wished to accept Our gracious Recess and have even rejected it in part.^[5]

[...]

§ 10. As Roman emperor and supreme steward of Christendom, it pertains to Our Imperial office to confess Our obligation to guard, protect, and maintain the holy Christian faith as it has been preserved until now and taught in an honorable and praiseworthy manner by the entire Holy Christian Church. Also to enforce Our Imperial edict, which We issued at Our first Diet at Worms [in 1521]. Therefore, We, together with Ours and the Holy Empire's obedient electors, princes, and estates, have at last decided, and have agreed and promised for Ourselves and Our subjects, to firmly remain faithful to the old, true, traditional Christian faith and religion, and by the honorable, praiseworthy ceremonies and usages that have always been performed in all the churches. And We will allow no alteration to them to be made prior to the decision by a future General Council.

§ 11. Despite Our edict issued at Worms, and despite the Recesses of the Diets We called to Nuremberg [in 1522, 1522–23, and 1524] and Speyer [1526, 1529], many abuses and innovations against the Christian faith and religion have been introduced.

§ 12. In particular, some have taught, written, and preached that, in the blessed Sacrament of the altar, the Body and Blood of Christ are not essentially present under both forms of bread and wine, but only in a figurative and symbolic way—plus many other un-Christian details, additions, and interpretations.

§ 13. Some preach and teach that Christ's command obliges every person to receive the blessed Sacrament of the altar under both forms [bread and wine]. And that those who administer or receive the Sacrament under one form, do so invalidly.

§ 14. Some have even suppressed the office of the Holy Mass and preached that the Masses are the worst form of blasphemy.

§ 15. Some have not entirely abolished the Masses but made changes to them to please themselves, which changes are against the long usage and the regulations and laws of all the Christian churches. The same is true of the singing of the Mass, the observance of the hours, other songs in praise of the Mother of God, the dear saints, and the holy Fathers, which are done to the honor of God and the edification of men, and which have been established and held in a common and uniform way in all the Christian churches. These have been abolished as blasphemous and un-Christian and replaced by other singing more to their taste.

§ 16. Some have taught that the Baptism of children is worthless, and that each person, when he arrives at the age of reason, ought to be baptized again. They do not regard Baptism as a sacrament, and some have abolished the good Christian ordinances honoring of the rite of Baptism and put others in their places.

§ 17. Some hold no prayers or ceremonies at all, and they do not permit their children to be baptized by a priest but by some lay person, man or woman, and they do this in plain [i.e., unblest] well water.

§ 18. Some do not have their children confirmed nor do they have the sacrament of Extreme Unction administered to the dying.

§ 19. Some have in inhumanly savage ways destroyed or burned the images of Our Savior, Christ, His venerable mother, Mary, and the dear saints, who for ages have been held in Christian memory by all Christian peoples.

§ 20. Some have taught that there is no free will, but that everything happens as it must happen, and not otherwise, out of inexorable necessity, and that therefore God is the true author of evil.

§ 21. Some have taught that there is no authority among Christians, and that there should be none.

§ 22. Some have taught that mere faith alone, without love and good deeds, saves, and they have [accordingly] condemned all good works.

§ 23. Some have completely destroyed the monasteries, parish churches, and altars.

§ 24. Some have abolished or diminished the venerable Christian ceremonies and practices concerning the remembrance of the life, suffering, death, and accomplishment of Christ Our Savior, which have been performed until now in the monasteries, parish churches, and chapels for the admonition and edification of the Christian people. And they have established other, un-Christian ordinances according to their own will, ability, and taste.

[...]

§ 26. Some rulers have forbidden their subjects on pain of severe punishment to listen, either in their villages or elsewhere, to preachers of the old, correct, true faith, to attend sermons or worships, or to confess the old faith. If the people do not obey, they are always punished.

[...]

§ 28. Some have taken the properties of the monasteries, other foundations, and vacant benefices for their own purposes. [...]

§ 29. Some have expelled the provosts, confessors, preachers, and other Christian overseers from the women's convents, and have introduced their own seducing preachers, confessors, and teachers in their places.

[...]

§ 31. Some have allowed the disuse, complete or partial, of the men's and women's convents, foundations, and other benefices, including the Mass stipends for the dead, which were established by many of Our ancestors of holy and just reputation, including Roman emperors, kings, princes, and other eminent estates. The religious^[6] are allowed to leave their houses if they wish, without permission from the officers of their orders, and to enter into what is alleged to be marriage or some other temporal estate. The abbots and abbesses are not permitted to prevent this. Some religious, both men and women, have been forced to renounce the monasteries and their properties permanently. They are also forced to confess that their monastic life was un-Christian and diabolical.

[...]

§ 33. Some orders have been forbidden to receive those who wish to join them or to receive vows of profession or obedience from such recruits.

§ 34. Some have removed their children and friends from the monasteries by force and against their will.

§ 35. Some have appointed priests to parishes and other benefices, or have taken them away, as and

when they wished and without [in the case of appointments] presenting them to the bishops, who (by law) are to examine and invest them. [...] Moreover, pastors and preachers who interpret the godly Word and the Scripture according to their own pleasure and against all the Imperial Recesses are installed and tolerated. [...]

§ 36. Such actions lead them to express contempt for the traditional practices of the other churches of Christendom, to insult all rulers and honorable folk in their sermons, and to incite the pious simple folk against one another. All sorts of mischief arises from such actions, the seducing, rejected, and condemned teaching gains entry everywhere, many wicked errors spread among the common people, all true devotion is annihilated, and Christian honor, discipline, virtue, law, fear of God, uprightness, and good, honest ways of living are entirely decayed.

§ 37. Such things are against not only the Holy Gospel and the Scripture but also the ancient, sound traditions and usages of the Christian churches and their ceremonies. [...] We have therefore unanimously decided that the aforementioned and all other innovations, which are against the entire Christian Church's faith, order, religion, ceremonies, and old and venerable prescriptions, and long established practices, as these have been laid down and instituted by the whole Christian Church and Councils held some centuries ago, shall be nullified and suppressed.

§ 38. It is therefore our command, intention, and desire that throughout the whole Roman Empire, it be strictly taught and preached that under the forms of bread and wine, the true Body and Blood of Christ Our Savior is essentially and truly present. [...] It also follows that the Christian Church, based on the promise of the Holy Spirit and sound reason, has most beneficially ordered and commanded that every Christian person, except for the celebrant of the Mass, be given the blessed Sacrament under the form of bread only, for it is truly received and taken under one form, not less or more than under both. We command that until a decision by a future Council shall be made, no innovation shall be introduced in this matter.

[...]

§ 42. The images of Christ, His dear mother, Mary, and the dear saints reinforce the memory of that which can be forgotten and move many to devotion. They were always permitted in all the Christian churches, and the iconoclasts were condemned by the whole Christian Church assembled in a number of Councils, and especially by our predecessor in the Empire, Emperor Charles I, the Great.^[7] Accordingly, We command that the said images not be removed, but that they shall be set up and maintained devoutly by all Christians. Also, where the altars and tabernacles have been removed, they shall be restored and preserved to the honor of God.

§ 43. Furthermore, some hold that there is no free will. Since this is an error, and since its corollaries are not human, but bestial, and blasphemous, they shall not be held, taught, or preached.

[...]

§ 45. It is clear from the Holy Scripture that mere faith alone, without love or good deeds, cannot make one just; also that God has prescribed good deeds for humans in many passages of the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, the aforementioned article, according to which mere faith alone suffices, and good deeds are rejected, shall be neither preached nor taught. In this matter, moderation and distinctions shall be maintained in accordance with the teachings of the whole Christian Church and the holy Fathers.

§ 46. Especially the seven holy Sacraments and their rites shall be maintained as in the Christian churches since ancient times, and as before this dispute, and all innovations shall be suppressed.

§ 47. All greater and lesser religious foundations, monasteries, parishes, and chapels shall maintain their

rules, ordinances, regulations, foundations, singing, reading, preaching, Masses, prayers, burials, and customary and venerable traditional Christian ceremonies, such as have always been observed in all churches.

§ 48. The vacant benefices shall be granted in the ordinary way to virtuous, suitable persons. The Masses for the dead shall be said, and the clergy shall not be hindered from conducting the proper visitations or from punishing the pastors, priests, and religious. Further, the regular and secular priests shall henceforth be wholly prevented from marrying.

§ 49. The priests who have allegedly married prior to this Recess shall from this moment be deprived of their spiritual benefices, jurisdictions, and offices, [...] [and] pastoral offices and other spiritual benefices shall be filled by their spiritual ruler or patron with other, suitable, unmarried priests.

[...]

§ 52. No ruler shall allow the clergy to live in open sin, especially with dishonorable, lewd women, or have such women around them, or wear non-clerical garb.

§ 53. Wherever the local clergy have been unjustly forced into servitude, protection, or treaties made with the laity, We declare that such [...] are null and void, despite any oath sworn or obligation assumed. Wherever monasteries and other ecclesiastical properties of any kind in the Holy Empire of the German Nation have been illegally sold, transferred, or converted to the use or possession of laymen, partly or wholly, such actions are not binding and are null and void, and from this moment on they are restored and released to their old status, and a fair compensation shall be paid for the purchased properties.

[...]

§ 55. We have agreed with the electors, princes, and estates on the following. We order, establish, and desire that henceforth no preacher anywhere shall be permitted to preach or be installed [in a preaching post] until he has been examined by the archbishop or bishop of his diocese, and until his life, doctrine, and suitability have been tested and found acceptable, and until he has been formally appointed to the preaching office. Such certified preachers, whether regulars or other sorts of priests, shall, without exception and despite any immunity, conform to this Recess in their preaching. Further, in their sermons they shall avoid anything that might give rise to a movement of the common man against the rulers or lead Christians into error or incite them against one another. In particular, they shall refrain [...] from saying that it is Our intention to wipe out the Gospel and the Holy Word of God, which was never intended or desired by Us or by the estates. Rather, We have been concerned, and are still of this Christian attitude, that the Holy Word of God be spread for the increase of Christian love, the fear of God, devotion, and good deeds, and that it be preserved in a Christian way of life. But not, as is the practice of the new teachers, to preach arbitrarily, selfishly, arrogantly, and with a desire to mislead the simple, common laity. It is rather Our will [...] that the preachers of the Gospel shall preach and teach according to the interpretation of the Holy Scripture and the teachings approved and accepted by the whole Christian Church, and that they shall refrain from preaching and teaching about what is under dispute, and [that they shall also refrain] from offering insults and ridicule, and await the decision of a Christian Council.

§ 56. These same preachers shall also refrain from dissuading the common Christian people from [attending] the office of the Holy Mass, prayers, and other good deeds, which has regrettably happened in many places. [...]

§ 57. Everyone, no matter what status, shall keep and obey Our ordinances, the laws, and the good traditional Christian usages, ceremonies, and everything else that the Christian churches have in the past laid down, commanded, and practiced with respect to Our holy Christian faith and worship. And they

shall undertake no innovations on pain of punishment to body, life, and property, such as each ruler shall inflict on offenders according to the gravity of the offense.

[...] We command that until a decision by a future General Council, these rules shall be obeyed in their entirety [...].

§ 58. Since much evil has been caused by irregular printing, We order [...] that each elector, prince, and estate of the Empire, spiritual or temporal, shall ensure that until the future Council, printers and booksellers shall produce or sell nothing new, and especially no polemical work, whether openly or secretly composed, unless it has been previously examined by persons appointed for this task by the spiritual or temporal authority. Every book shall contain the printer's surname and given name, and the city in which it was printed shall also be named. If anything is missing, the book shall not be printed or offered for sale. Polemics and similar works already printed shall not be offered for sale or sold. If the author, the printer, or the bookseller shall disobey this ordinance and command, the ruler of that place shall, where possible, punish him physically or take his property. Any ruler, whoever he may be, who is found lax in this matter shall be cited and proceeded against by Our Imperial Fiscal^[8] and shall be punished, with the punishment to be determined by Our Imperial Chamber Court according to his status and the severity of his failure to enforce the law.

§ 59. Since We issued Our Imperial edict [of Worms], many bishoprics, higher and lesser ecclesiastical foundations, and monasteries have been illegally deprived of their autonomy and administration and laid waste. Bishops, prelates, pastors, monks, and nuns have been expelled without due legal proceedings; and their dioceses, monasteries, foundations, castles, properties, rents, dues, furniture, and treasures have been confiscated and partly sold, appropriated, and taken from them. Divine, ecclesiastical, Imperial law forbids anyone to deprive someone of what is his arbitrarily, improperly, or illegally, and it especially forbids the seizure and robbery of properties given to the churches and to God, and even more the abolition or liquidation of the pious foundations donated for the glory of God. Therefore, We order that the bishoprics, foundations, and monasteries and their properties, which have been unjustly confiscated, whether by clerical or by lay persons, or were taken during the peasants' rebellion,^[9] shall be returned to their rightful owners. [...] All this by pain of the ban of outlawry established by Our Imperial public peace,^[10] about which more details are contained in Our mandate on the criminal law.^[11]

§ 60. There is no doubt In Our Imperial mind that there are still many stalwart Christians who adhere to the old, true Christian faith and oppose the rebellious, seducing, and already condemned teachings. So that such people may maintain their honorable, firm attitude, as is proper, and are not deterred therefrom by any coercion, We [...] wish that those who reside in territories, cities, villages, and hamlets that have not accepted Our Recess, shall, so long as they maintain their Christian attitude and are obedient to this Recess, enjoy the Holy Empire's special protection and defense of themselves, their properties, wives, and children—just as Our and the Holy Empire's special wards do.^[12] Further, We decreed by virtue of Our Imperial authority that the same burghers, male and female, and residents who confess and hold to the old Christian faith shall, if need be, be allowed free emigration for themselves and their goods from such territories, cities, villages, and hamlets, and they shall not be burdened by any exit fine or payment.

§ 61. Although in the holy Christian churches no General Council has been held for many years, it is highly necessary that one be held now, so that the aforementioned errors, abuses, and failings that afflict Our holy Faith shall be reformed and brought to a better condition and order. Another reason is that the enemy of the Christian faith, the Turk, has taken over many Christian kingdoms and will take over even more, if no prompt action is taken and the situation is not handled effectively as one of great emergency. Such a Council has been humbly requested and prayed for, without distinction, by Us and Ours and the Holy Empire's electors, princes, and estates and envoys gathered here at Augsburg, both by those who

hold with Us Our ancient, true Christian faith as it has always been maintained by the holy Christian churches, and by those who have undertaken the aforementioned innovations. We [...] have decided to undertake a Christian reformation and reinforcement of the Christian faith and to ask His Holiness to call, within six months of the end of this Diet, a General Christian Council to a suitable meeting place.

§ 62. In many Imperial Recesses issued in the past, it is clearly expressed and provided, that interests, rents, dues, and tithes must be paid to those to whom there are owed, whether clergy or laity, without resistance or obstruction, and that they should not be hindered from collecting the tithes owed them. We have learned, however, that in some places these prescriptions have not been enforced. It pertains to Us, as behooves a Roman emperor, to see that no one is deprived of what is his illegally or by force. We therefore order and desire that every ruler, whether spiritual or temporal, and his subjects, both clerical and lay, shall retain their rents, dues, interests, tithes, rights, and prerogatives, and that no one shall deprive another of them or disturb or hinder their possession, but that each shall be paid and allowed to take possession of his inheritance, his perpetual and other interests, dues, tithes, rights, and other prerogatives.

[...]

§ 64. We [...] command that this, Our Recess, shall be fully obeyed and enforced in all of its stipulations, provisions, and conceptions regardless of earlier Recesses enacted by our previous Imperial Diets, insofar as these Recesses and ordinances may be detrimental to the faith. And We command it despite any objections, opposition, and appeals that have been or may be directed to a General Council, to Us, or to anyone else. [...]

NOTES

[1] The signatories to the Confession of Augsburg, the Lutheran statement of doctrine submitted to Charles at Augsburg—trans.

[2] Refers to the “Confutation” of the Confession of Augsburg, which a group of leading German Catholic theologians composed; a milder version was read in the emperor’s name on August 3—trans.

[3] This expression, either “blessed Sacrament” or “blessed Sacrament of the altar,” always refers to the sacramental rite Catholics call “the Eucharist” and Protestants call “the Lord’s Supper” —trans.

[4] This mention of “sacramentarians” refers to the followers of Huldrych Zwingli of Zurich, who had been engaged in a dispute with Martin Luther about the chief sacrament since 1526—trans.

[5] Refers to the first redaction of the Recess (September 22, 1530), which the Protestant estates refused to sign—trans.

[6] The “religious” is medieval Catholic usage for regular clergy, that is, persons who live as members of religious orders in constituted communities—trans.

[7] Refers to the Council of Nicaea in 787, which had permitted the veneration of images, and to Charlemagne, who had ordered this decision overturned by the Synod of Frankfurt in 794—trans.

[8] The Fiscal was the executive branch of the Imperial Chamber Court and was charged with the execution of the court’s judgments—trans.

[9] An allusion to the Peasants’ War of 1525—trans.

[10] Refers to the Public Peace of 1495. The Imperial ban meant outlawry, the secular equivalent of excommunication. A banned person could be expropriated or killed by anyone with impunity—trans.

[11] Refers to the Imperial Criminal Code [*Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*] issued during this same Diet—trans.

[12] Refers to the groups who stood under special royal protection, such as the Jews and the Imperial monasteries—trans.

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