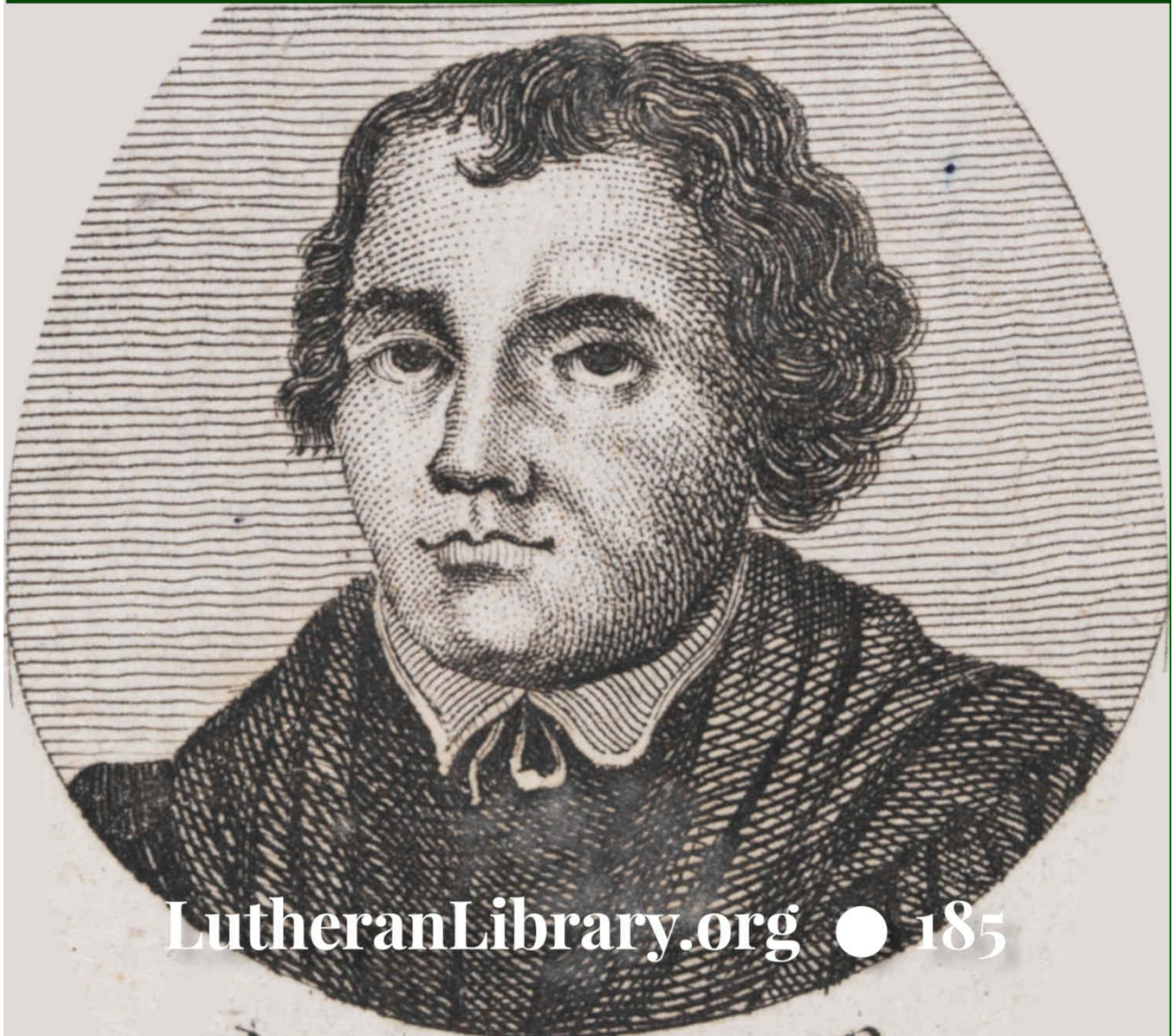


# William Dau

## Luther Examined and Reexamined



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MARTIN LUTHER.

# Luther Examined and Reexamined

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# Luther Examined and Reexamined

## *A Review of Catholic Criticism and a Plea for Revaluation*

By William H. T. Dau

PROFESSOR, CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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# Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking spiritual truth.

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WILLIAM H. (HERMAN) T. (THEODORE) DAU (1864-1944), pastor Memphis, Tenn., served as president of Valparaiso University and of Concordia College, Conover, North Carolina, and as professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He edited *The Lutheran Witness* and *The Theological Quarterly*.

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# Preface

ONE MAY DEPLORE the pathetic courage which periodically heartens Catholic writers for the task of writing against Luther, but one can understand the necessity for such efforts, and, accordingly, feel a real pity for those who make them. Attacks on Luther are demanded for Catholics by the law of self-preservation. A recent Catholic writer correctly says:

“There is no doubt that the religious problem today is still the Luther problem.” “Almost every statement of those religious doctrines which are opposed to Catholic moral teaching find their authorization in the theology of Martin Luther.”

Rome has never acknowledged her errors nor admitted her moral defeat. The lessons of past history are wasted upon her. Rome is determined to assert to the end that she was not, and cannot be, vanquished. In the age of the Reformation, she admits, she suffered some losses, but she claims that she is fast retrieving these, while Protestantism is decadent and decaying. No opposition to her can hope to succeed.

This is done to bolster up Catholic courage. The intelligent Catholic layman of the present day makes his own observations, and draws his own conclusions as to the status and the future prospect of Protestantism. Therefore, he must be invited to:

“...acquaint himself with the life story of the man, whose followers can never explain away the anarchy of that immoral dogma: ‘Be a sinner, and sin boldly; but believe more boldly still!’ He must be shown the many hideous scenes of coarseness, vulgarity, obscenity, and degrading immorality in Martin Luther’s life.”

When the Catholic rises from the contemplation of these scenes, it is hoped that his mind has become ironclad against Protestant argument. These attacks upon Luther are a plea *pro domo*, the effort of a strong man armed to keep his palace and his goods in peace.

Occurring, as they do, in this year of the Four-hundredth Anniversary of the Reformation, these attacks, moreover, represent a Catholic counter-demonstration to the Protestant celebration of the Quadricentenary of Luther's Theses. They are the customary cries of dissent and vigorous expressions of disgust which at a public meeting come from parties in the audience that are not pleased with the speaker on the stage. If the counter-demonstration includes in its program the obliging application of eggs in an advanced state of maturity to the speaker, and chooses to emphasize its presence to the very nostrils of the audience, that, too, is part of the prevailing custom. It is aesthetically incorrect, to be sure, but it is in line historically with former demonstrations. No Protestant celebration would seem normal without them. They help Protestants in their preparations for the jubilee to appreciate the remarks of David in Psalm 2:11:

“Rejoice with trembling.”

And if Shakespeare was correct in the statement: “Sweet are the uses of adversity,” they need not be altogether deplored.

An attempt is made in these pages to review the principal charges and arguments of Catholic critics of Luther. The references to Luther's works are to the St. Louis Edition; those to the Book of Concord, to the People's Edition.

Authors must be modest, and as a rule they are. In the domain of historical research there is rarely anything that is final. This observation was forced upon the present writer with unusual power as the rich contents of his subjects opened up to him during his study. He has sought to be comprehensive, at least, as regards essential facts, in every chapter; he does not claim that his presentation is final. He hopes that it may stimulate further research.

This book is frankly polemical. It had to be, or there would have been no need of writing it. It seeks to meet both the assertions and the spirit of Luther's Catholic critics. A review ought to be a mirror, and mirrors must reflect. But there is no malice in the author's effort.

W. H. T. DAU.

Concordia Seminary, *St. Louis, Mo. May 10, 1917.*

# 1. Luther Worship

CATHOLIC WRITERS profess themselves shocked by the unblushing veneration which Luther receives from Protestants. Such epithets as “hero of the Reformation,” “angel with the everlasting Gospel flying through the midst of heaven,” “restorer of the Christian faith,” grate on Catholic nerves. Luther’s sayings are cited with approval by all sorts of men. Men feel that their cause is greatly strengthened by having Luther on their side. Luther’s name is a name to conjure with. Hardly a great man has lived in the last four hundred years but has gone on record as an admirer of Luther. Rome, accordingly, cries out that Luther is become the uncanonized saint of Protestantism, yea, the deified expounder of the evangelical faith.

Coming from a Church that venerates and adores and prays to — you must not say “worships”—as many saints as there are days in the calendar, this stricture is refreshing. Saints not only of questionable sanctity, but of doubtful existence have been worshiped — beg pardon! venerated — by Catholics. What does the common law say about the prosecution coming into court with clean hands? If there is such a thing among Protestants as “religious veneration” of Luther, what shall we call the veneration of Mary among Catholics? Pius IX, on December 8, 1854, proclaimed the “immaculate conception,” that is, the sinlessness of Mary from the very first moment of her existence, thus removing her from the sphere of sin-begotten humanity. In 1913, the press of the country was preparing its readers for another move towards the deification of Mary: her “assumption” was to be declared. That is, it was to be declared a Catholic dogma that the corpse of Mary did not see corruption, and was at the moment of her death removed to heaven. The *Pasadena Star* of August 15th in that year wrote:

“It is now known that since his recent illness Pope Pius, realizing that his active pontificate is practically at an end, has expressed to some of the highest dignitaries of the Catholic Church at Rome the desire to round out his career by this last great act.”

The *Western Watchman* of July 3rd in that year had in its inimitable style referred to the coming dogma, thus:

“What Catholic in the world today would say that the immaculately conceived body of the Blessed Virgin was allowed to rot in the grave? The Catholic mind would rebel against the thought; and death would be preferred to the blasphemous outrage.”

The grounds for wanting the “assumption” of Mary fixed in a dogma were these:

“Catholics believe in the bodily assumption of the Blessed Virgin, because their faith instinctively teaches them that such a thing is possible and proper, and that settles it in favor of the belief. The body of our Lord should not taste corruption, neither should the body that gave Him His body. The flesh that was bruised for our sins was the flesh of Mary. The blood that was shed for our salvation was drawn from Mary’s veins. It would be improper that the Virgin Mother should be allowed to see corruption if her Son was exempted from the indignity.”

If any should be so rash as to question the propriety of the new dogma, the writer held out this pleasant prospect to them:

“Dogmas are stones at the heads of heretics... The eyes of all Catholics see aright; if they are afflicted with strabismus, the Church resorts to an operation. All Catholics hear aright; if they do not, the Church applies a remedy to their organ of hearing. These surgical operations go under the name of dogmas.”

The world remembers with what success an operation of this kind was performed on a number of Roman prelates, who questioned the infallibility of the Pope. The dogma was simply declared in 1870, and that put a quietus to all Catholic scruples. Some day the “assumption” of Mary will be proclaimed as a Catholic dogma. We should not feel surprised if ultimately a dogma were published to the effect that the Holy Trinity is a Holy Quartet, with Mary as the fourth person of the Godhead.

The Roman Church is accustomed to speak of her Supreme Pontiff, the Holy Father, the Vicegerent of Christ, His Infallible Holiness, in terms that lift a human being to heights of adoration unknown among Protestants. For centuries the tendency in the Roman Church to make of the Pope “a god on earth” has been felt and expressed in Christendom.

This Church wants to preach to Protestants about the sin of man-worship! Verily, here we have the parable of the mote and the beam in a twentieth century edition. Catholic teachers would be the last ones, we imagine, whom scrupulous Christians would choose for instructing them regarding the sin of idolatry and the means to avoid it.

No Protestant regards Luther as Catholics regard Mary, not even Patrick. Luther has taught them too well for that. Unwittingly the Catholics themselves have immortalized Luther by naming the Evangelical Church after Luther. Luther declined the honor.

“I beg,” (he said,) “not to have my name mentioned, and to call people not Lutheran, but Christian. What is Luther? The doctrine is not mine, nor have I been crucified for any one... The papists deserve to have a party-name, for they are not content with the doctrine and name of Christ; they want to be popish also. Well, let them be called popish, for the Pope is their master. I am not, and I do not want to be, anybody’s master.” (10, 371.)

It is likely that the frequent laudatory mention of Luther’s name, especially in connection with the present anniversary of the Reformation, is taken as a challenge by Catholics. If it is that, it is so by the choice of Catholics. It is impossible to speak of a great man without referring to the conflicts that made him great. “He makes no friend,” says Tennyson, “who never made a foe.” “The man who has no enemies,” says Donn Piatt, “has no following.” Opposition is one of the accepted marks of greatness. The opposition which great men aroused during their lifetime lives after them, and crops out again on a given occasion. This is deplorable, but it is the ordinary course. Moreover, it is possible that in a season of great joy like that which the Quadricentenary of the Reformation has ushered in orators and writers may fail to put a due check on their enthusiasm and may overstate a fact. Such things happen even among Catholics, we believe, But they will be negligible quantities in the present celebration. The proper corrective for them will be provided by Protestants themselves. The vast majority of those who have embraced the spiritual leadership of Luther in matters pertaining to Christian doctrine and morals will prove again that they are in no danger of inaugurating man-worship. The spirit of Luther is too much alive in them for that. They will, with the Marquis of Brandenburg, declare:

“If I be asked whether with heart and lip I confess that faith which God has restored to us by Luther as His instrument, I have no scruple, nor have I a disposition to shrink from the name Lutheran. Thus understood, I am, and shall to my dying hour remain, a Lutheran.”

They will ever be able to distinguish between the man Luther, prone to error and sin like any other mortal, and the Luther who fought the battle of the Lord and had a mission of everlasting import to the Church and the world. They have shown on numerous occasions that they can be friends of Luther, and yet criticize him or dissent from him. If they had not, there would be no Protestants whom Catholics can quote as “opponents” of Luther. On the other hand, if any one undertakes to enlighten the public with a view of Luther, Protestants will insist that his estimate comport with the facts in the case, and that the name of a great man who deserves well of posterity be not traduced. Why, even the Catholic von Schlegel thinks Luther has not been half esteemed as he ought to be.

## 2. Luther Hatred

CATHOLIC WRITERS HAVE FOUND so much to censure in the character and writings of Luther that one is amazed, after reading them, how Luther ever could become regarded as a great and good man. Criminal blindness must have held the eyes, not only of Luther's associates, but of his entire age, yea, of men for centuries after, if they failed to see Luther's constitutional baseness. Quite recently a Catholic writer has told the world in one chapter of his book that "the apostate monk of Wittenberg" was possessed of "a violent, despotic, and uncontrolled nature," that he was "depraved in manners and in speech." He speaks of Luther's "ungovernable transports, riotous proceedings, angry conflicts, and intemperate controversies," of Luther's "contempt of all the accepted forms of human right and all authority, human and divine," of "his unscrupulous mendacity," "his perverse principles," "his wild pronouncements." He calls Luther "a lawless one," "one of the most intolerant of men," "a revolutionist, not a reformer." He says that Luther "attempted reformation and ended in deformation." He charges Luther with having written and preached "not for, but against good works," with having assumed rights to himself in the matter of liberty of conscience which "he unhesitatingly and imperiously denied to all who differed from him," with having "rent asunder the unity of the Church," with having "disgraced the Church by a notoriously wicked and scandalous life," with having "declared it to be the right of every man to interpret the Bible to his own individual conception," with "one day proclaiming the binding force of the Ten Commandments and the next declaring they were not obligatory on Christian observance," with having "reviled and hated and cursed the Church of his fathers."

These opprobrious remarks are only a part of the vileness of which the writer has delivered himself in his first chapter. His whole book bristles with assertions of Luther's inveterate badness. This coarse and crooked Luther, we are told, is the real Luther, the genuine article. The Luther of history is only a Protestant fiction. Protestants like Prof. Seeberg of Berlin,

and others, who have criticized Luther, are introduced as witnesses for the Catholic allegation that Luther was a thoroughly bad man. We should like to ascertain the feelings of these Protestants when they are informed what use has been made of their remarks about Luther. Some of them may yet let the world know what they think of the attempt to make them the squires of such knights errant as Denifle and Grisar.

It is about ten years ago since the Jesuit Grisar began to publish his *Life of Luther*, twice that time, since Denifle painted his caricature of Luther. Several generations ago Janssen, in his *History of the German Nation*, gave the Catholic interpretation of Luther and the Reformation. Going back still further, we come to the Jesuit Maimbourg, to Witzel, and in Luther's own time to Cochlaeus and Oldecop, all of whom strove to convince the world that Luther was a moral degenerate and a reprobate. The book of Mgr. O'Hare, which has made its appearance on the eve of the Four-hundredth Anniversary of Luther's Theses, is merely another eruption from the same mud volcano that became active in Luther's lifetime. It is the old dirt that has come forth. Rome must periodically relieve itself in this manner, or burst. Rome hated the living Luther, and cannot forget him since he is dead. It hates him still. Its hatred is become full-grown, robust, vigorous with the advancing years. When Rome speaks its mind about Luther, it cannot but speak in terms of malignant scorn. If Luther could read Mgr. O'Hare's book, he would say: "*Wes das Herz voll ist, des gehet der Mund ueber.*" (Matt. 12:34: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.")

Luther has done one thing which Rome will never pardon: he dared to attack the supreme authority of the Pope. He made men see the ignominious bondage in which cunning priests had ensnared them, and by restoring them to the liberty with which Christ had made them free Luther caused the papacy an irreparable loss. The papal system of teaching and government was so thoroughly exposed by Luther, and has since been so completely disavowed by a great part of professing Christians that Rome cannot practice its old frauds any longer. Men have become extremely wary of Rome. That is what hurts. The Catholic writer to whom we referred sums up the situation thus: Since Luther "all Protestant mankind descending by ordinary generation have come into the world with a mentality biased, perverted, and prejudiced." That is Rome's way of looking at the matter. The truth is: the world is forewarned, hence forearmed against the pleas of Rome. It pays only an indifferent attention to vilifications of Luther that



come from that quarter, because it expects no encomiums and only scant justice for Luther from Rome. But it is the business of the teachers of Protestant principles in religion, particularly of the church historians of Protestantism, to take notice of the campaign of slander that is launched against Luther by Catholic writers at convenient intervals. It is not a task to delight the soul, rather to try the patience, of Christians. For in the study of the causes for these calumnies against a great man of history, and of the possible means for their removal, one is forced invariably to the conclusion that there is but one cause, and that is hatred. What can poor mortal man do to break down such a cause? It does not yield to logic and historical facts, because it is in its very nature unreasoning and unreasonable.

Still, for the hour that God sends to all the Sauls that roam the earth breathing threatening and slaughter, the counter arguments should be ready. No slander against Luther has ever gone unanswered. As the charges against Luther have become stereotyped, so the rejoinder cannot hope to bring forward any new facts. But it seems necessary that each generation in the Church Militant be put through the old drills, and learn its fruitful lessons of spiritual adversity. Thus even these polemical exchanges between Catholics and Protestants become blessings in disguise. But they do not affect Luther. The sublime figure of the courageous confessor of Christ that has stood towering in the annals of the Christian Church for four hundred years stands unshaken, silent, and grand, despite the froth that is dashed against its base and the lightning from angry clouds that strikes its top. "Surely, the wrath of man shall praise thee." (Ps. 76:10.)

### 3. Luther Blemishes

WHEN LUTHER IS CHARGED with immoral conduct, and the specific facts together with the documentary evidence are not submitted along with the charge, little can be done in the way of rebuttal. One can only guess at the grounds on which the charge is based. For instance, when Luther is said to have disgraced the Church by a notoriously wicked and scandalous life, the reason is most likely because he married although he was a monk sworn to remain single. Moreover, he married a noble lady who was a nun, also sworn to celibacy. According to the inscrutable ethics of Rome this is concubinage, although the Scripture plainly declares that a minister of the Church should be the husband of one wife, 1 Tim. 3:2, and no vows can annul the ordinance and commandment of God: "It is not good that man should be alone." Gen. 2:18. Comp. 1 Cor. 7:2, and Augsburg Confession, Art. 27.

When Luther is said to have reviled, hated, and cursed the Church of his fathers, the probable reason is, because he wrote the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* and *The Papacy at Rome Founded by the Devil*. In these writings Luther depicts the true antichristian inwardness of the papacy. By so doing, however, Luther restored the Church of his fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers in Christ down to the first ancestor of our race. Luther's faith is none other than the faith of the true Church in all the ages. Luther's own father and mother died in that faith.

When Luther is said to have taught Nietzsche's insanity about the "Superhuman" (*Übermensch*) before Nietzsche, to have put the Ten Commandments out of commission for Christians, and to have preached against good works, the reasons most likely are these: Luther taught salvation in accordance with Rom. 3:25: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law." Luther taught that a person is not saved by his own works, and if he performs good works with that end in view, he shames his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10, 4), and he falls

under the curse of God for placing his own merits alongside of the merit of the Redeemer's sacrifice. In no other connection has Luther spoken against good works. He has rather taught men how to become fruitful in well-doing by the sanctifying grace of God and according to the inspiring example of the matchless Jesus. Concerning the Law, Luther preached 1 Tim. 1:9: "The Law is not made for a righteous man," that is, Christians do the works of the Law, not for the Law's sake, but for the sake of Christ, whom they love and whose mind is in them. They must not be driven like slaves to obey God, but their very faith prompts them to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit. 2:12). But Luther always held that the rule for good works is laid down in the holy Law of God, and only in that; also that the Law must be applied to Christians, in as far as they still live in, the flesh, and are not become altogether spiritual. Luther's public activity as a preacher began with a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments, and this effort to expound the divine norm of righteousness was repeated several times during Luther's life. Luther's expositions of the Decalog are among the finest that the world possesses. Moreover, Luther wrote the Small Catechism. Hand any Catholic who talks about Luther having abolished the Ten Commandments this little book. That is a sufficient refutation. What Luther teaches in this book he has given his life to reduce to practice in himself and others. He says in a sermon on Easter Monday, 1530:

"When rising in the morning, I pray with my children the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and some Psalm. I do this because I want to make myself cling to these truths. I shall not suffer my faith to become mildewed with the imagination that I am above these things (*dass ich's koenne*)."

His sermon on the First Sunday in Advent in the same year he begins thus:

"Dear friends, I am now an old Doctor, still I find every day that I must recite with the children the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, and I have always derived a great benefit and blessing from this practice." (12, 1611. 1641.)

Luther is charged with mendacity, that is, he is said to have lied. The reasons that will be given for this charge, when called for, will probably be these: Luther at various times in his life gave three different years as the year of his birth, three different years as the year when he made his journey to Rome, and advised somebody in 1512 to become a monk when he had

already commenced to denounce the monastic life: It is true that Luther did all these things, but it is also true that Luther believed himself right in each of his statements. He was simply mistaken. Other people have misstated the year of their birth without being branded liars on that account. Sometimes even a professor forgets things, and Luther was a professor. What Luther has said about the rigor of his monastic life is perfectly true, but it was no reason why in 1512 he should counsel men to become monks. He had not yet come to the full knowledge of the wrong principles underlying that mode of life. To adduce such inaccuracies as evidence of prevarication is itself an insincere act and puts the claimant by right in the Ananias Club.

Luther is said to have been a glutton and a drunkard.

“Let us examine the facts. What is the evidence? Luther’s obesity and his gout. Is that evidence? Not in any court. It would be evidence if both conditions were caused, and caused only, by gluttony and tippling. But this notoriously is not the case. Obesity may be due to disease. A man may even eat little and wax stout if what he eats turns into adipose rather than into muscular tissue. As for gout, it is the result of uric acid diathesis. Now uric acid diathesis may be, and very often is, caused by high living, but often, too, it is due to quite different causes. Just as in the case of Bright’s disease. I do not deny that Luther drank freely both beer and wine. So did everybody else. People drank beer as we do coffee... Moreover, in the sixteenth century alcoholic beverages were prescribed for the maladies from which Luther suffered much — kidneys and nervous trouble. We now know that in such cases alcohol proves a very poison; but this Luther could not know. But intemperate ...in his use of strong drink Luther was not. Neither was he a glutton. Before he married, he ate very irregularly, and often completely forgot his meals. When he could not get meat and wine, he contented himself with bread and water... Melancthon tells us that Luther loved the coarse food as he did the coarse speech of the peasantry, and even of that food ate little, so little that Melancthon marveled how Luther could maintain strength upon such a diet.—It is further a noteworthy fact that, when we read the sermons of the day, we find nobody who so frequently and so earnestly attacks the prevailing vice of drunkenness as does Luther. Now, whatever Luther may or may not have been, hypocrite he was not. Had he himself been intemperate, he would not have preached against it in such a manner. Furthermore, Luther was under constant espionage. His every move was noted. People knew how many patches there were on his undergarments. Think you, think you for a moment, that the Wittenbergians would have listened meekly to Luther’s repeated assaults upon the wide-spread sin of intemperance, had they known him for a confirmed tippler? It is too absurd.—But the best evidence for the defense comes from a mute witness — Luther’s industry. He wrote more than four hundred books, brochures, sermons, and so forth, filling more than one hundred volumes of the Erlangen edition. There are extant more than three thousand of his letters, which represent only a small proportion of all that he wrote. Thus we know, for example, that one evening in 1544 Luther wrote ten letters, of which only two have been preserved. He was, furthermore, in frequent conference with leaders in both Church and State. He preached on Sundays and lectured on week-days. Now, a man may, it is true, perform a considerable amount of manual labor even after overeating and overdrinking, but every physician will admit the correctness of my assertion, it is a physiological impossibility that a man could habitually overindulge in food or liquor, or both, and still get over the enormous amount of intellectual work that Luther performed day to day” (Boehmer, *The Man Luther*, p. 16 f.)

Most shameless have been the charges of lewdness and immorality against Luther. His relation to Frau Cotta has been represented as impure. Think of it, a boy of sixteen to eighteen thus related to an honorable housewife! Illegitimate children have been foisted upon him. A humorous remark about his intention to marry and being unable to choose between several eligible parties has been twisted into an immoral meaning. The fact that he gave shelter overnight to a number of escaped nuns, when he was already a married man, has been meaningfully referred to. Boehmer has exhaustively gone into these charges, examining without flinching every asserted fact

cited in evidence of Luther's moral corruptness, and has shown the purity of Luther as being above reproach. Not one of the sexual vagaries imputed to Luther rests on a basis of fact. (Boehmer, *Luther in Light of Recent Research*, pp. 215-223.)

When the modern reader meets with a general charge of badness, or even with the assertion of some specific form of badness, in Luther, he should inquire at once to what particular incident in Luther's life reference is made. These charges have all been examined and the evidence sifted, and that by impartial investigators. Protestants have taken the lead in this work and have not glossed anything over. Boehmer's able treatise has been translated into English. Walther's *Fuer Luther wider Rom* will, no doubt, be given the public in an English edition soon. Works like these have long blasted the claim of Catholics that Protestants are afraid to have the truth told about Luther. They only demand that the *truth* be told.

## 4. Luther's Task

ONE BLEMISH in the character of Luther that is often cited with condemnation even by Protestants deserves to be examined separately. It is Luther's violence in controversy, his coarse language, his angry moods. All will agree that violence and coarse speech must not be countenanced in Christians, least of all in teachers of Christianity. In the writings of Luther there occur terms, phrases, passages that sound repulsive. The strongest admirer of Luther will have moments when he wishes certain things could have been said differently. Luther's language cannot be repeated in our times. Some who have tried to do that in all sincerity have found to their dismay that they were wholly misunderstood. What Jove may do any ox may not do, says an old Latin proverb.

Shall we, then, admit Luther's fault and proceed to apologize for him and find plausible reasons for extenuating his indiscretions in speech and his temperamental faults? We shall do neither. We shall let this "foul-mouthed," coarse Luther stand before the bar of public opinion just as he is. His way cannot be our way, but ultimately none of us will be his final judges. The character of the duties which Luther was sent to perform must be his justification.

It is true, indeed, that the manners of the age of Luther were generally rough. Even in polite society language was freely used that would make us gasp. Coarse terms evidently were not felt to be such. In their polemical writings the learned men of the age seem to exhaust a zoological park in their frantic search for striking epithets to hurl at their opponent. It was an age of strong feeling and sturdy diction. It is also true that Luther was a man of the people. With a sort of homely pride he used to declare: "I am a peasant's son; all my forbears were peasants." But all this does not sufficiently explain Luther's "coarseness."

Most people that criticize Luther for his strong speech have read little else of Luther. They are not aware that in the, great mass of his writings there is but a small proportion of matter that would nowadays be declared

objectionable. Luther speaks through many pages, yea, through whole books, with perfect calmness. It is interesting to observe how he develops a thought, illustrates a point by an episode from history or from every-day life, urges a lesson with a lively exhortation. He is pleasant, gentle, serious, compassionate, artlessly eloquent, and, withal, perfectly pure in all he says. When Luther becomes “coarse,” there is a reason. One must have read much in Luther, one should have read all of Luther, and his “billingsgate” will assume a different meaning. If there is madness in his reckless speech, there is method in it. One must try and understand Luther’s objective and purpose.

Luther had a very coarse subject to deal with, and Luther believed that a spade is best called a spade. Luther never struck at wickedness with the straw of a fine circumlocution. He believed that he had the right, yea, the duty, to call coarse things by coarse names; for the Bible does the same. Luther has called the gentlemen at the Pope’s court in his day some very descriptive names. He did not merely insinuate that the cardinals of his day were no angels, but said outright what they were. He did not feebly question the holiness of His Holiness, but he called some of the Popes monsters of iniquity and reprobates. We shall show anon that in that age there lived men who spoke of the same matters as Luther, who told tales and used expressions that would render their writings unmailable [ED: VIOLATING US MAIL DECENCY CLAUSES] today.

The great men of any age are products of that age. Man is as much the creature of circumstances as circumstances are the creatures of men — Disraeli to the contrary notwithstanding. While men may create situations, they may also be made to fit into a situation. Men have become great for this very reason that they understand the spirit of their age and were able to respond to its call. Back of both men and circumstances, however, stands sovereign Providence, shaping our ends, rough-hew them how we will.

No character study is just that fails to take into consideration the force of circumstances under which the subject of the study has acted at a given moment in his life. In the case of Luther there is a more than ordinary necessity for adopting this equitable method; for Luther has declared hundreds of times that his stirring utterances and incisive deeds were not the result of long premeditation, or the sudden outbursts of uncontrolled passion, — though neither he nor we would have any interest in denying that he could be angry and did become angry, — but the answer to crying



needs of the times. This answer was on many a signal occasion wrung from Luther after much wrestling with God in prayer. He was moved to action by the heroism of that faith which had been kindled in him. He acted in harmony with the particular issue with which he was called upon to deal. Deep compassion at the sight of his suffering fellow men put strong language on his lips. Between the pleading of friends and the storming of enemies he had no choice but to act as he did. Luther often seems unconscious of the greatness of his acts: he speaks of them as "his poor way of doing things," and invites others to improve what he has attempted. We fear that many in our day fail to see the greatness of the achievement while they stricture the manner of achieving it.

Few men have so utterly lived for a cause, in a cause, and with a cause as Luther. It is the heart of an entire people that cries out through Luther; it is the soul of outraged Christianity that moans in anguish, and speaks with the majesty of righteous anger through Luther. An age of unparalleled ferment that had begun long before Luther has reached its culminating point, and lifts up its strident voice of long-restrained expostulation through Luther. Remove the conditions under which Luther had to live and labor, and the Luther whom men bless or curse becomes an impossibility.

In Luther's life work there is discernible the influence not only of good men, such as the scholarly Melanchthon, the faithful Jonas, the firm and kind Saxon electors, the eager Amsdorf, the alert Link, but also of evil men like the blunt Tetzl, the wily Prierias, and the horde of ignorant monks which the monasteries and chancelleries of Rome let loose upon one man. The course which Luther had to pursue was shaped for him by others. We do not mean to suggest that Luther in his polemical writings employed the cheap method of replying to the coarse language adopted by his opponents in similar language; but it is fair to him that this fact be recorded. Some people remember very well that Luther addressed the Pope "Most hellish father!" and are horrified, but they forget that the Pope had been extremely lurid in the appellatives which he applied to Luther. "Child of Belial," "son of perdition," were some of the endearing terms with which Luther was to be assured of the loving interest the Holy Father took in him. That Luther called Henry VIII "a damnable and rotten worm" seems to be well remembered, but that the British king had called Luther "a wolf of hell" is forgotten. It goes without saying that the contact with such opponents did for Luther what it does for every person who is not made of granite and cast

iron: it roused his temper. It should not have been permitted to do that, we say. Assuredly. Luther thinks so too, but with a reservation, as we shall learn.

The “imperious spirit” and “violent measures” charged against Luther a careful reader of history will rather find on the side of Luther’s opponents. They plainly relied on the power of Rome to crush Luther by brute force. What respect could a plain, honest man like Luther conceive for men like Cajetanus, Eck, and Hoogstraten, who were first sent by the Vatican to negotiate his surrender? For publishing simple Bible-truth the cardinal at Augsburg roared and bellowed at him, “Recant! Recant!” Even at this early stage of the affair matters assumed such an ominous aspect that Luther’s friends urged him to quietly leave the city. They did not trust the amicable gentleman from the polished circle of the Pope’s immediate counselors. At Leipzig, Eck had been driven into the corner by Luther’s unanswerable arguments from Scripture; then he turned to abuse and called Luther a Bohemian and a Hussite, and finally left the hall with the air of a victor to celebrate his achievement in the taverns and brothels of the city, where he found his customary delights learned from his masters at Rome. Can any language of contempt in which Luther afterwards spoke of this doughty champion of Rome be too strong? Among the attendants at the Leipzig Debate was Hoogstraten. This gentleman followed the elevating profession of torturing and burning heretics in Germany, — the territory especially assigned to him. It looked as if he had come to Leipzig to follow up Eck’s verbal thunder with the inquisitorial lightning, and make of Luther actually another Hus. When he found that he would not have an opportunity for plying his hideous trade this time, he ventured into territory where he was a stranger: he attempted a theological argument with Luther. He asserted that by denying the primacy of the Pope, Luther had contradicted the Scriptures and defied the Council of Nice, and must be suppressed. Luther called him an unsophisticated ass and a bloodthirsty enemy of the truth. Certainly, that does not sound nice, but such things happen, as a rule, when fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

What was the papal bull of excommunication against Luther, with its list of most opprobrious terms, but an unwarranted provocation of Luther, who had a right to expect different treatment from the foremost teacher of Christianity to whom he had entrusted his just grievance as a dutiful son of the Church? Thus we might go on for pages citing instances of reckless

attack upon Luther, often by most unworthy persons, that drew from Luther a reply such as his assailants deserved.

It is a gratuitous criticism to say that Christians must not revile when they are reviled. Those who think that Luther did not know this rule of the Christian religion, or did not apply it to himself, do not know the full story of his life. He certainly did wrestle with the flesh and blood in himself. He sighed for peace, but the moment he seemed to become conciliatory and pacific, his enemies set up a shout that he was vanquished. It seemed that they could not be made to comprehend the issues confronting them unless they were blown in upon them on the wings of a hurricane. As early as 1520 Luther replies to an anxious letter of Spalatin, who thought that Luther had used too strong language against the Bishop of Meissen, as follows:

“Good God! how excited you are, my Spalatin! You seem even more stirred up than I and the others. Do you not see that my patience in not replying to Emser’s and Eck’s five or six wagonloads of curses is the sole reason why the framers of this document have dared to attack me with such silly and ridiculous nonsense? For you know how little I cared that my sermon at Leipzig was condemned and suppressed by a public edict; how I despised suspicion, infamy, injury, hatred. Must these audacious persons even be permitted to add to these follies scandalous pamphlets crammed full of falsehoods and blasphemies against Gospel-truth? Do you forbid even to bark at these wolves? The Lord is my witness how I restrained myself lest I should not treat with reverence this accursed and most impotent document issued in the bishop’s name. Otherwise I should have said things those heads ought to hear, and I will yet, when they acknowledge their authorship by beginning to defend themselves. I beg, if you think rightly of the Gospel, do not imagine its cause can be accomplished without tumult, scandal, and sedition. Out of the sword you cannot make a feather, nor out of war, peace. The Word of God is a sword, war, ruin, destruction, poison, and, as Amos says, it meets the children of Ephraim like a bear in the way and a lioness in the woods.—I cannot deny that I have been more vehement than is seemly. But since they knew this, they ought not to have stirred up the dog. How difficult it is to temper one’s passions and one’s pen you can judge even from your own case. This is the reason I have always disliked to engage in public controversy; but the more I dislike it, the more I am involved against my will, and that only by the most atrocious slanders brought against me and the Word of God. If I were not carried away thereby either in temper or pen, even a heart of stone would be moved by the indignity of the thing to take up arms; and how much more I, who am both passionate and possessed of a pen not altogether blunt! By these monstrosities I am driven beyond modesty and decorum. At the same time, I wonder where this new religion came from, that whatever you say against an adversary is slander. What do you think of Christ? Was He a slanderer when He called the Jews an adulterous and perverse generation, the offspring of vipers, hypocrites, sons of the devil? And what about Paul when he used the words dogs, vain babblers, seducers, ignorant, and in Acts 13 so inveighed against a false prophet that he seems almost insane: ‘Oh, thou full of deceit and of all craft, thou son of the devil, enemy of the truth’? Why did he not gently flatter him, that he might convert him, rather than thunder in such a way? It is not possible, if acquainted with the truth, to be patient with inflexible and ungovernable enemies of the truth. But enough of this nonsense. I see that everybody wishes I were gentle, especially my enemies, who show themselves least so of all. If I am too little gentle, I am at least simple and open, and therein, as I believe, surpass them, for they dispute only in a deceitful fashion.” (19:482 f. Translation by McGiffert.)

Nobody should make Luther any better than he makes himself. Still, the question is pertinent whether violent polemics can ever be engaged in by Christians with a good conscience. Luther has asserted that, while he hurled his terrible denunciations against the adversaries of the truth, his heart was disposed to friendship and peace with them. (16:1718 f.) Is a state of mind like this altogether inconceivable, viz., that a person can curse another for a certain act and at the same time love him? We think not. In his day this boisterous, turbulent Luther was understood, trusted, and loved by the people. After the publication of the Theses against Tetzl:

“...the hearts of men in all parts of the land turned toward him, and his heart turned toward them. For the religious principles underlying the theses they cared little, for the arguments sustaining them still less. They saw only that here was a man, muzzled by none of the prudential considerations closing the mouths of many in high places, who dared to speak his mind plainly and emphatically, and was able to speak it intelligently and with effect upon a great and growing evil deplored by multitudes. It is such a man the people love and such a man they trust.” (McGiffert, *Luther*, p. 98 f.)

McGiffert has the right perception of the Luther of 1517-1519 when he describes him as “the awakening reformer,” thus:

“He had the true reformer’s conscience — the sense of responsibility for others as well as for himself, and the true reformer’s vision of the better things that ought to be. He was never a mere faultfinder, but he was endowed with the gifts of imagination and sympathy, leading him to feel himself a part of every situation he was placed in, and with the irrepressible impulse to action driving him to take upon himself the burden of it. In any crowd of bystanders he would have been first to go to the rescue where need was, and quickest to see the need not obvious to all. The aloofness of the mere observer was not his; he was too completely one with all he saw to stand apart and let it go its way alone. Fearful and distrustful of himself he long was, but his timidity was only the natural shrinking before new and untried duties of a soul that saw more clearly and felt more keenly than most. The imperative demands inevitably made upon him by every situation led him instinctively to dread putting himself where he could not help responding to the call of unfamiliar tasks; but once there, the summons was irresistible, and he threw himself into the new responsibilities with a forgetfulness of self possible only to him who has denied its claims, and with a fearlessness possible only to him who has conquered fear. He might interpret his confidence as trust in God, won by the path of a complete contempt of his own powers; but however understood, it gave him an independence and a disregard of consequences which made his conscience and his vision effective for reform.”

McGiffert suggests a comparison of Luther with, let us say, Erasmus.

“Had he been a humanist, he would have laughed the whole thing [Tetzel’s selling of indulgences] to scorn as an exploded superstition beneath the contempt of an intelligent man; had he been a scholastic theologian, he would have sat in his study and drawn fine distinctions to justify the traffic without bothering himself about its influence upon the lives of the vulgar populace. But he was neither humanist nor schoolman. He had a conscience which made indifference impossible, and a simplicity and directness of vision which compelled him to brush aside all equivocation and go straight to the heart of things. With it all he was at once a devout and believing son of the Church, and a practical preacher profoundly concerned for the spiritual and moral welfare of the common people.” (p. 66f. 87.)

Had Luther considered his personal interests as Erasmus did, he would not have become the Luther that we know. Erasmus in his day was regarded as

the wisest of men; Luther in his own view, like Paul, frequently had to make a fool of himself in order to achieve his purpose. For instance, when he wrote against the dullards at the University of Louvain, against the sacrilegious coterie at Rome that was running the Church and the world pretty much as they pleased, or against the brutal “Hans Wurst” (Duke Henry of Brunswick). Erasmus and his school of gentle reformers always counseled a slackening of the pace and the use of the soft pedal. Where is Erasmus today in the world’s valuation? Even Rome, in whose bosom he nestled, and who fondled him for a season, has cast him aside as worthless. Luther lives yet, to the delight not only of Coleridge, but of millions of the world’s best men, who, with the British divine, regard him this very hour as “a purifying and preserving spirit to Christianity at large.”

Luther was conscious of the difference in the method of warfare between himself and his colaborer Melanchthon. He says:

“I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and altogether warlike. I am born to fight against innumerable monsters and devils. I must remove stumps and stones, cut away thistles and thorns, and clear wild forests; but Master Philip comes along softly and gently, sowing and watering with joy, according to the gifts which God has abundantly bestowed upon him.”  
(14, 176.)

Dr. Tholuck, writing on “Luther’s rashness,” says: “What would have become of the Church if the Lord’s servants and prophets had at all times done nothing else than spread salves upon sores and walk softly?” He introduces Luther in his own defense:

“On one occasion, when asked by the Marquis Joachim I why he wrote against the princes, he returned the beautiful answer: ‘When God intends to fertilize the ground, He must needs send first of all a good thunderstorm, and afterwards slow and gentle rain, and thus make it thoroughly productive.’ Elsewhere he says: ‘A willow-branch may be cut with a knife and bent with a finger, but for a great and gnarled oak we must use an ax and a wedge’; and again: ‘If my teeth had been less sharp, the Pope would have been more voracious.’

‘Of what use is salt,’ he exclaims in another passage, ‘if it do not bite the tongue? or the blade of a sword unless it be sharp enough to cut? Does not the prophet say, “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and keepeth back his sword from blood?”’

One reflection suggests itself in this connection that goes far to exonerate Luther: the language which the Bible employs against heretics and ungodly

men. It calls them dogs, Ps. 22:20; 59:6; Is. 56:10; Matt. 7:6; Phil. 3:2; Rev. 22:15; swine, Matt. 7:6; boars and wild beasts, Ps. 80:13; dromedaries and asses, Jer. 2:23f.; bullocks, Jer. 31:18; bellowing bulls, Jer. 50:11; viper's brood, Matt. 3:7; foxes, Cant. 2:5; Luke 13:32; serpents, Matt. 23:33; sons of Belial, 1 Sam. 2:12; children of the devil, Acts 13:10; Satan's synagogue, Rev. 2:9. As regards its language, the Bible, too, agrees with the conditions of the times in which it was written. When God, to express His righteous anger, addresses the ungodly in such terms of utter contempt, He teaches us how to regard them and, on occasion, to speak of them. This "coarse" Luther is not more vehement and repulsive in his speech than the holy Word of God.

We remarked before that we would not apologize for Luther's rashness and coarse speech. Luther's acts are self-vindicating; they will approve themselves to the discriminating judgment of every reader of history. We can appreciate this sentiment of McGiffert:

"As well apologize for the fury of the wind as for the vehemence of Martin Luther."

The Psalmist calls upon the forces of nature: "Praise the Lord, fire, and hail; snow and vapors; stormy wind fulfilling His word." (Ps. 148:7. 8.) God has a mission that our philosophy does not fathom for the mad hurry and destruction of the whirlwind. How silly it would be to criticize a cyclone because it is not a zephyr! We can imagine a scene like this: The battle of Gettysburg is in progress and a gentle lady is permitted to see it from a distance by a grim, warlike guide, and the following conversation ensues:

"Why, they are shooting at each other! Did you see that naughty man stab the pretty soldier right through his uniform?"

"Yes, madam, that is what he is there for."

"But is it not horrid?"

"Yes, madam, it is perfectly horrid. It is hell."

"But what are they doing this beastly work for?"

"Madam, they are fighting for a principle that is to keep this country a united republic."

"Can anything be more horrid?—I mean, not the principle, but this awful butchery."

"Yes, madam, there is something more horrid than that."

"What is it?"

“If there would be no one to fight for that principle.”

War is never a pleasant affair. When men are forced to fight for what is dearer to them than life, they will strike hard and deep. It is silly to expect a soldier to walk up to his enemy with a fly brush and shoo him away, or to stop and consider what posterity would probably regard as the least objectionable way for dispatching an enemy. Luther was called to be a warrior; he had to use warriors' methods. Any general in a bloody campaign can be criticized for violence with as much reason as is shown by some critics of Luther.



## 5. The Popes in Luther's Time

TO JUDGE INTELLIGENTLY the activity of Luther it is necessary to understand the state of the Church in his day and the character of the chief bishops of the Church. When reading modern censures of Luther's attacks upon the papacy, one wonders why nothing is said about the thing that Luther attacked. Catholic critics of Luther surely must know what papal filth lies accumulated in the *Commentarii di Marino Sanuto*, in Alegretto Alegretti's *Diari Sanesi*, in the *Relazione di Polo Capello*, in the *Diario de Sebastiano di Branca de Tilini*, in the *Successo di la Morte di Papa Alessandro*, in Tommaso Inghirami's *Fea, Notizie Intorno Rafaele Sanzio da Urbino*, and others. Ranke worked with these authorities when he wrote his *History of the Popes*. What about the authorities which Gieseler cites in his *Ecclesiastical History* — Muratori, Fabronius, Machiavelli, Sabellicus, Raynaldus, Eccardus, Burchardus, etc.? A compassionate age has relegated the exact account of the moral state of the papacy in Luther's days to learned works, and even in these they are given mostly in Latin footnotes. In the language of Augustus Birrell, they are "too coarse."

Luther's life (1483-1546) falls into the administration of nine Popes: Sixtus IV, 1471-1484; Innocent VIII, 1484-1492; Alexander VI, 1492-1503; Pius III, 26 days in 1503; Julius II, 1503-1513; Leo X, 1513-1521; Hadrian VI, 1522-1523; Clement VII, 1523-1534; Paul III, 1534-1549.

Speaking of this series of Popes, the historian Gieseler says:

"The succession of Popes which now follows proves the degeneracy of the cardinals (from among whom the Pope is chosen) as to all discipline and sense of shame: they were distinguished for nothing but undisguised meanness and wickedness; they were reprobates."

Of Sixtus IV he says:

“His chief motive was the small ambition to raise his family from their low estate to the highest rank.”

Infamous transactions which resulted in the murder of Julian de Medici while at high mass in church and the hanging of the archbishop of Pisa from a window of the town hall by the exasperated people, wars, conspiracies, alliances, annulments of alliances, in short, all the acts that fill up the turbulent life of a crafty and grasping politician, are recorded for his administration. He did not scruple to employ the authority of his exalted office for the furtherance of his political schemes. Thus he excommunicated Venice and formed a warlike alliance against the city. But the Venetians regarded his religious thunderbolts as little as his physical prowess. “Vexation at this hastened the death of the Pope, who was hated as much as he was despised.”

Ranke, on the authority of Alegretti, relates of Pope Sixtus IV:

“The Colonna family, opponents of the Pope’s nephew Riario, was persecuted by him with the most savage ferocity. He seized on their domain of Marino, and causing the prothonotary Colonna to be attacked in his own house, took him prisoner, and put him to death. The mother of Colonna came to St. Celso, in Banchi, where the corpse lay, and lifting the severed head by its hair, she exclaimed: ‘Behold the head of my son. Such is the truth of the Pope. He promised that my son should be set at liberty if Marino were delivered into his hands. He is possessed of Marino, and, behold, we have my son — but dead. Thus does the Pope keep his word.’”

His successor, Innocent VIII, “in defiance of the conditions of his election, sought with a still more profligate vileness to exalt and enrich his seven illegitimate children.” He had been elected on the condition that he would make only one blood relative a cardinal, and that certain other benefices of the Church should not be given to any one related to him. The people called him *Nocens* (the Guilty One, or the Harmful One) instead of Innocent, and immortalized the prolific paternity of this saintly celibate in the following epigram:

*Octo Nocens genuit pueros totidemque puellas,  
Hunc merito poterit dicere Roma patrem,*

that is,

Nocens begat eight boys and an equal number of maidens;  
Rightly, then, Rome will be able to call this gentleman father.

“He carried on two wars with Ferdinand, king of Naples, until the year 1492, and brought forward Renatus, duke of Lorraine, as pretender to his crown. True, he proceeded, as his predecessors had done, to encourage princes and people to undertake expeditions against the Turks; but when Dschem, the brother and rival of the Turkish Sultan Bajazet, was delivered over to him at the head of an army against the Turks, he chose rather to detain him in prison on consideration of an annual tribute from the Turkish Sultan.” The story how the Pope got possession of the Turkish prince and refused 200,000 ducats ransom for him because he had received an offer of 600,000 from another party, reads like a story of professional brigandage.

Alexander VI, “the most depraved of all the Popes, likewise recognized no loftier aim than to heap honors and possessions upon his five illegitimate children, and among them especially his favorite, Caesar Borgia.” The nuptials celebrated for the Pope’s daughter Lucretia — who, by the way, was a *divorcee* — were “by no means peculiarly decorous.” The Latin chronicler who has related them reports in this connection that the moral state of the clergy at Rome was indescribably low. The example of the Popes had set the pace for the rest. From the highest to the lowest each priest had his concubine as a substitute for married life (“*concubinas in figura matrimonii*”), and that, quite openly. The good chronicler remarks: “If God does not provide a restraint, this corruption will pass on to the monks and the religious orders; however, the monasteries of the city are nearly all become brothels already, and no one raises his voice against it.” Wading through the mephitic rottenness of these ancient chronicles, one is seized with nausea.

Holy things, religious privileges, had become merchandise with which the Popes trafficked. The chronicler Burchardus relates: "In those days the following couplet was sung in nearly the whole Christian world:

*"Vendit Alexander claves, Altaria, Christum,  
Emerat ista prius, vendere juste potest."*

The meaning of this satire is: Alexander sells the power of the keys of heaven, the right to officiate at the altar, yea, Christ Himself; he had first

bought these things himself, therefore he has a right to sell them again. Unblushing perfidy was practiced by this Pope in his dealings with kings who were his religious subjects. In a quarrel with Charles VIII of France he threatened the king with excommunication, and sought aid from the Turkish Sultan. "However, when Charles appeared in Rome, the Pope went over to his side immediately, and delivered up to him Prince Dschem; but he took care to have him poisoned immediately, that he might not lose the price set upon his head by the Sultan." Thus he conciliated the French monarch and filled his purse by one and the same act. "By traffic in benefices, sale of indulgences, exercise of the right of spoils, and taxes for the Turkish war, as well as by the murder of rich or troublesome persons, Alexander was seeking to scrape together as much money as possible to support the wanton luxury and shameful licentiousness of his court, and provide treasures for his children." In their correspondence men who had dealings with him would refer to him in such terms as these:

"That monstrous head — that infamous beast!"  
(*"Hoc monstruoso capite — hac infami belua!"*)

At length the poison which the Pope had meant for a rich cardinal, in order to make himself master of his wealth, brought upon himself well-deserved death. The Pope's butler had been bribed and exchanged the poison-cup intended for the Pope's victim for the Pope's cup, and the Pope took his own medicine.

On the basis of Alegretti's notes, Ranke has drawn a fine pen-picture of the reign of terror which Caesar Borgia, the favorite son of Alexander VI, inaugurated at Rome.

“With no relative or favorite would Caesar Borgia endure the participation of his power. His own brother stood in his way: Caesar caused him to be murdered and thrown into the Tiber. His brother-in-law was assailed and stabbed, by his orders, on the steps of his palace. The wounded man was nursed by his wife and sister, the latter preparing his food with her own hands, to secure him from poison; the Pope set a guard upon the house to protect his son-in-law from his son. Caesar laughed these precautions to scorn. ‘What cannot be done at noonday,’ said he, ‘may be brought about in the evening.’ When the prince was on the point of recovery, he burst into his chamber, drove out the wife and sister, called in the common executioner, and caused his unfortunate brother-in-law to be strangled. Toward his father, whose life and station he valued only as a means to his own aggrandizement, he displayed not the slightest respect or feeling. He slew Peroto, Alexander’s favorite, while the unhappy man clung to his patron for protection, and was wrapped within the pontifical mantle. The blood of the favorite flowed over the face of the Pope.—For a certain time the city of the apostles and the whole state of the Church were in the hands of Caesar Borgia... How did Rome tremble at his name! Caesar required gold, and possessed enemies. Every night were the corpses of murdered men found in the streets, yet none dared move; for who but might fear that his turn would be next? Those whom violence could not reach were taken off by poison. There was but one place on earth where such deeds were possible — that, namely, where unlimited temporal power was united to the highest spiritual authority, where the laws, civil and ecclesiastical, were held in one and the same hand.”

**Pope Julius, who came into power after the twenty-six days’ reign of Pius III, was a warlike man.**

“He engaged in the boldest operations, risking all to obtain all. He took the field in person, and having stormed Mirandola, he pressed into the city across the frozen ditches and through the breach; the most disastrous reverses could not shake his purpose, but rather seemed to waken new resources in him.”

“He wrested Perugia and Bologna from their lords. As the powerful state of Venice refused to surrender her conquests, he resolved at length, albeit unwillingly, to avail himself of foreign aid; he joined the League of Cambrai, concluded between France and the Emperor, and assisted with spiritual and temporal weapons to subdue the republic. Venice, now hard pressed, yielded to the Pope, in order to divide this overwhelming alliance. Julius, already alarmed at the progress of the French in Italy, readily granted his forgiveness, and now commenced hostilities against the French and their ally, Alphonso, Duke of Ferrara. He declared that the king of France had forfeited his claim on Naples, and invested Ferdinand the Catholic with the solo dominion of his realm. He issued a sentence of condemnation against the Duke of Ferrara. Lewis XII strove in vain to alarm him by the National Council of Tours, — Germany, by severe gravamina (complaints of national grievances against the Papal See), and by the threat of the Pragmatic Sanction (an imperial order to confirm the decrees of such reform councils as that of Basel). Not even a General Council, summoned at Pisa by the two monarchs for the first of September, 1511, with the dread phantom of a reform of the Church, could bend the violent Pope.” The Council of Pisa the Pope neutralized by convening a Lateran Council, which at the Pope’s bidding hurled its thundering manifestos in the name of the Almighty against the Pope’s enemies. He died while this conflict was raging. Luther was in Rome while the Pope was engaged as just related.”

What elements of appalling greed and levity had entered the holiest transactions of the Church can be seen from the following summing up of the situation daring Luther’s time: "A large amount of worldly power was at this time conferred in most instances, together with the bishoprics; they were held more or less as sinecures according to the degree of influence or court favor possessed by the recipient or his family. The Roman Curia thought only of how it might best derive advantage from the vacancies and presentations; Alexander extorted double annates or first-fruits, and levied double, nay, triple tithes; there remained few things that had not become matter of purchase. The taxes of the papal chancery rose higher from day to day, and the comptroller, whose duty it was to prevent all abuses in that department, most commonly referred the revision of the imposts to those very men who had fixed their amounts. For every indulgence obtained from the datary’s office, a stipulated sum was paid; nearly all the disputes occurring at this period between the states of Europe and the Roman Court arose out of these exactions, which the Curia sought by every possible means to increase, while the people of all countries as zealously strove to restrain them.

"Principles such as these necessarily acted on all ranks affected by the system based on them, from the highest to the lowest. Many ecclesiastics were found ready to renounce their bishoprics; but they retained the greater part of the revenues, and not unfrequently the presentation of the benefices dependent on them also. Even the laws forbidding the son of a clergyman (!) to procure induction to the living of his father, and enacting that no ecclesiastic should dispose of his office by will (!), were continually evaded; for as all could obtain permission to appoint whomsoever he might choose as his coadjutor, provided he were liberal of his money, so the benefices of the Church became in a manner hereditary.

"It followed of necessity that the performance of ecclesiastical duties was grievously neglected... In all places incompetent persons were entrusted with the performance of clerical duties; they were appointed without scrutiny or selection. The incumbents of benefices were principally interested in finding substitutes at the lowest possible cost; thus the mendicant friars were frequently chosen as particularly suitable in this respect. These men occupied the bishoprics under the title (previously unheard of in that sense) of suffragans; the cures they held in the capacity of vicars." (!)

In order not to extend this review too long, we shall refer only to one other Pope, Leo X. It was in the main a prosperous reign that was inaugurated by Leo X. A treaty was concluded with France, which had invaded Italy. By a diplomatic maneuver the Pragmatic Sanction was annulled, and the Lateran Council was ordered to pronounce its death-warrant. France was humbled.

"All resistance was vain against the alliance of the highest spiritual with the highest temporal power. Now, at last, the papacy seemed once more to have quelled the hostile spirit which had grown up at Constance and Basel (two church councils which tried to reform the papacy, but failed), and found its stronghold in France, and at this very time it was near its most grievous fall."

Two years later Luther, not fathoming as yet the depths of iniquity which he was beginning to lay bare, published his Ninety-Five Theses.

Leo X is the Pope that excommunicated Luther. Ranke describes the closing hours of his life. The Pope had been extremely successful in his political schemes.

"Parma and Placentia were recovered, the French were compelled to withdraw, and the Pope might safely calculate on exercising great influence over the new sovereign of Milan. It was a crisis of infinite moment: a new state of things had arisen in politics — a great movement had commenced in the Church. The aspect of affairs permitted Leo to flatter himself that he should retain the power of directing the first, and he had succeeded in repressing the second."

(This refers to Luther's protest; the Pope was, of course, mistaken in the view that he had put a stop to Luther's movement by excommunicating him.)

“He was still young enough to indulge the anticipation of fully profiting by the results of this auspicious moment. Strange and delusive destiny of man! The Pope was at his villa of Malliana when he received intelligence that his party had triumphantly entered Milan; he abandoned himself to the exultation arising naturally from the successful completion of an important enterprise, and looked cheerfully on at the festivities his people were preparing on the occasion. He paced backward and forward till deep in the night, between the window and the blazing hearth — it was the month of November. Somewhat exhausted, but still in high spirits, he arrived at Rome, and the rejoicings there celebrated for his triumph were not yet concluded, when he was attacked by a mortal disease. ‘Pray for me,’ said he to his servants, ‘that I may yet make you all happy.’ We see that he loved life, but his hour was come, he had not time to receive the sacrament nor extreme unction. So suddenly, so prematurely, and surrounded by hopes so bright! he died—‘as the poppy fadeth.’”

In the record of Sanuto, who is witness for these events, there is a “*Lettera di Hieronymo Bon a suo barba, a di 5 Dec.*” which contains the following:

“It is not certainly known whether the Pope died of poison or not. He was opened. Master Fernando judged that he was poisoned, others thought not. Of this last opinion is Master Severino, who saw him opened, and says he was not poisoned.” (Ranke, I, 34 ff.; Gieseler, III, 290 ff., at random.)

Out of such conditions grew Luther's work. But on these conditions Catholic critics of Luther maintain a discreet — shall we not say, a guilty? —silence. Few Catholic laymen to whom the horrors of Luther's life are painted with repulsive effect know the horrors which Luther faced. They are only told that Luther attacked “Holy Mother.” They are not told that “Holy Mother” had become the harlot of the ages.



## 6. Luther's Birth and Parentage

CATHOLIC WRITERS make thorough work in explaining the reasons for Luther's "defection" from Rome. They apply to Luther's stubborn resistance the law of heredity: Luther's wildness was congenital. Some have declared him the illegitimate child of a Bohemian heretic, others, the oaf of a witch, still others, a changeling of Beelzebub, etc.

Many of these writers, giving themselves the airs of painstaking investigators who have made careful research, repeat the tale of Barbour, viz., that Luther was born in the day-and-night room of an inn at Eisleben. If this is so, Luther's mother must have been a traveler on the day of her first confinement. If this were so, the fact could, of course, be easily explained without dishonor to Luther's mother: she merely miscalculated the date of the birth of her first-born, — not an unusual occurrence. Carlyle believed this story, but gave it an almost too honorable turn, by likening the inn at Eisenach to the inn at Bethlehem.

But this story of Luther's birth in a bar-room is not history; it belongs in the realm of mythology. Nobody knows today the house where Luther was born. Preserved Smith, his latest American biographer, says there is a house shown at Eisleben as Luther's birthplace, but it is "not well authenticated." (p. 2.) There is a bar and a restaurant in this particular building *now*, for the accommodation of foreign visitors. It is possible that in this mythical birthplace of Luther you can get a stein of foaming "monk's brew" or a "benedictine" from the monastery at Fecamp, or a "chartreuse" from Tarragona, distilled according to the secret formula of the holy fathers of La Grande Chartreuse. If you sip a sufficient quantity of these persuasive liquors, you will find it possible to believe most anything. And the blessing of the holy fathers who have prepared the beverages for your repast will be given you gratis in addition to their liquors.

The journey of Luther's mother to Eisleben which compelled her to put up at an inn is, likewise, imaginary. Melancthon, Luther's associate during the greater part of the Reformer's life, investigated the matter and states that

Luther was born at his parents' home in Eisenach during their temporary sojourn in that city, prior to their removal to Mansfeld.

These stories about the place and manner of Luther's birth originated in the seventeenth century. They were unknown in Luther's time. Generations after a great man has died gossip becomes busy and begins to relate remarkable incidents of his life. Lincoln did not say or do one half of the interesting things related about him. He has been drawn into that magical circle where myths are formed, because his great name will arouse interest in the wildest tale. That is what has happened to Luther. These "myths" are an unconscious tribute to his greatness. One might let them pass as such and smile at them.

But the Catholic version of Luther's birth is needed by their writers as a corollary to another "fact" which they have discovered about Luther's father Hans. Hans Luther, so their story runs, was a fugitive from justice at the time of his Martin's birth. In a fit of anger he had assaulted or slain a man in his native village of Moehra, and abandoning his small landholdings, he fled with his wife, who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. Color is lent to this story by the discovery that the Luthers at Moehra were generally violent folk. Research in the official court-dockets at Salzungen, the seat of the judicial district to which Moehra belonged, shows that brawls were frequent in that village, and some Luthers were involved in them. Now follows the Catholic deduction, plausible, reasonable, appealing, just like the "assumption" of Mary: "Out of the gnarly wood of this relationship, consisting mostly of powerful, pugnacious farmers, assertive of their rights, Luther's father grew."

This story was started in Luther's lifetime. George Wicel, who had fallen away from the evangelical faith, accused Luther of having a homicide for a father. In 1565, he published the story under a false name at Paris, but gave no details. In Moehra nothing was known of the matter until the first quarter of the twentieth century. This circumstance alone is damaging to the whole story. Luther was during his lifetime exposed to scrutiny of his most private affairs as no other man. If Wicel's tale could have been authenticated, we may rest assured that would have been done at the time.

In the eighteenth century a mining official in Thuringia by the name of Michaelis told the story of Hans Luther's homicide with the necessary detail to make it appear real. Observe, this was 220 years after the alleged event. It had been this way: Hans Luther had quarreled with a person who

was plowing his field, and had accidentally slain the man with the bridle, or halter, of his horse. Several Protestant writers now began to express belief in the story. Travelers came to Moehra for the express purpose of investigating the matter, *e.g.*, Mr. Mayhew of the *London Punch*. Behold, the story had assumed definite shape through being kept alive a hundred years: the accommodating citizens of Moehra were now able to point out to the inquiring Englishman the very meadow where the homicide had taken place. It takes an Englishman on the average two years and four months to see the point of a joke. By this time, we doubt not, it will be possible to exhibit to any confiding dunce the very horse-bridle with which Hans Luther committed manslaughter, also the actual hole which he knocked into the head of his victim, beautifully surrounded by a border of blue and green, which are the colors which the bruise assumed six hours after the infliction. The border may not be genuine, but we dare any Catholic investigator to disprove the genuineness of the hole.

Writers belonging to a church that is rich in legends of the saints and in relics ought to know how a tale like Wicel's can assume respectability and credibility in the course of time. It is not any more difficult to account for these tales about Hans Luther's homicide than for the existence in our late day of the rope with which Judas hanged himself, or the tears which Peter wept in the night of the betrayal, or the splinters from the cross of the Lord, or the feathers from the wings of the angel Gabriel, and sundry other marvels which are exhibited in Catholic churches for the veneration of the faithful.

No historian that has a reputation as a scholar to lose today credits the story of Hans Luther's homicide. It is improbable on its face. The small landholdings of Hans at Moehra are not real, but unreal estate. Nobody has found the title for them. There is, however, a very good reason why Hans should want to leave Moehra. He was, according to all that is known of his father's family, the oldest son. According to the old Thuringian law the home place and appurtenances of a peasant freeholder passed to the youngest son. McGiffert regards the custom as "admirably careful of those most needing care." (p. 4.) Luther's father, on coming of age, was by this law compelled to go and seek his fortune elsewhere, because opportunity for rising to independence there was none for him at Moehra.

If Hans was a fugitive from justice, he was certainly unwise in not fleeing far enough. For at Eisenach, whither he went, he was still under the

same Saxon jurisdiction as at Moehra. He seems to have had no fear of abiding under the sovereignty which he is claimed to have offended. This observation has led one of the most exact and painstaking of modern biographers of Luther, Koestlin, to say that the homicide story, if it rests on any basis of fact, must either refer to a different Luther, or if to Hans, the incident cannot have been a homicide. It should be remembered that there is no authentic record which in any way incriminates Hans Luther.

Lastly, this homicide Hans Luther, eight years after coming to Mansfeld, is elected by his fellow-townsmen one of the "Vierherren," or aldermen, of the town. Only most trusted and well-reputed persons were given such an office. A homicide would not have been allowed to settle at Mansfeld, much less to govern the town. Any rogue in the town that he had to discipline in his time of office would have thrown his bloody record up to him.

A Catholic writer says: "The wild passion of anger was an unextinguished and unmodified heritage transmitted congenitally to the whole Luther family, and this to such an extent that the Lutherzorn (Luther rage) has attained the currency of a German colloquialism." Mr. Mayhew thinks that "Martin was a veritable chip of the hard old block," the "high-mettled foal cast by a fiery blood-horse." Catholic writers cite Mr. Mayhew as a distinguished Protestant. If you have not heard of him before, look him up in *Who is Who?* most anywhere.

All this, however, is a desperate attempt to find proof against an assumed criminal by circumstantial evidence. No direct evidence has ever been available to implicate Luther's father in a village brawl. As to the Lutherzorn, Luther has in scores of places explained the real reason of it: Luther did not inherit, but Rome roused it. This Lutherzorn may arise in any person that is not remotely related to the Luthers after reading Catholic biographies of Martin Luther.

## 7. Luther's Great Mistake

CATHOLIC WRITERS CONTEND that Luther made a mistake when he became monk. Protestants share this view, but put the emphasis in the sentence: Luther became a monk, at a different place. In the Protestant view the mistake is this, that Luther became a *monk*, in the Catholic view, it is this, that *Luther* became a monk. Protestants regard monasticism largely as a perversion of the laws of nature and of Christian morals. In an institution of this kind Luther could not find the relief he sought. His mistake was that he sought it there. Catholics view monkery as the highest ideal of the Christian life, and blame Luther for entering this mode of life when he was altogether unfit for it. They regard Luther as guilty of sacrilege for seeking admission into the order of Augustinian friars. When he was permitted to turn monk, that which is holy was given unto a dog, and pearls were cast before a swine.

Catholics argue that Luther's cheerless boyhood, the poverty of his parents, the hard work and close economy that was the order in the home at Mansfeld, the harsh and cruel treatment which Luther received from parents that were given to "fits of uncontrollable rage" induced in Luther a morose, sullen spirit. He became brooding and stubborn when yet a child. He was a most unruly boy at school. His character was not improved when he was sent abroad for his education and had to sing for his bread or beg in the streets. His rebellious spirit found nourishment in these humiliations. Owing to his melancholy temperament and gloomy fits, he made no friends. He felt himself misunderstood everywhere. Even the little season of sunshine that came into his young life at the Cotta home in Eisenach did not cure him of the morbid feeling that nobody appreciated him. He began to loathe the studies which he was pursuing in accordance with the wish of his father. To certain occurrences, like the slaying of a fellow-student, an accident with which he met on a vacation trip, and a sudden thunderstorm, he gave an ominous interpretation which deepened his despondency. At last he determined, "inconsiderately and precipitately," to enter a cloister. His

friends “instinctively felt he was not qualified or fitted for the sublime vocation to which he aspired, and they accordingly used all their powers to dissuade him from the course he had chosen. All their efforts were fruitless, and from the gayety and frolic of the banquet” which he had given his fellow-students as a farewell party “he went to the monastery.” He was so reckless that he took this step even without the consent of his parents. “He knew little about the ways of God, and was not well informed of the gravity and responsibilities of the step he was taking.” “He was not called by God to conventual life; ...he was driven by despair, rather than the love of higher perfection, into a religious career.” Catholics feel so sure that they have a case against Luther that in all seriousness they ask Protestants the question: Did he act honestly when he knelt before the prior asking to be received into the order?

Luther has later in life given various reasons for entering the monastery. His case was not simple, but complex. One reason, however, which he has assigned is the severe bringing up which he had at his home. Hausrath is satisfied with this one reason, and many Catholic writers adopt his view. But this remark of Luther is evidently misapplied if it is made to mean that Luther sought ease, comfort, leniency in the cloister as a relief from the hard life which he had been leading. Luther had grasped the fundamental idea in monkery quite well: flight from the secular life as a means to become exceptionally holy. He sought quiet for meditation and devotion, but no physical ease and earthly comforts. He knew of the rigors of cloister-life. He willingly bowed to “the gentle yoke of Christ”—thus ran the monkish ritual — which the life of an eremite among eremites was to impose on him. His hard life in the days of his boyhood and youth had been an unconscious preparation for this life. He had been strictly trained to fear God and keep His commandments. The holy life of the saints had been held up to him as far back as he could remember as the marvel of Christian perfection. Home and Church had cooperated in deepening the impressions of the sanctity of the monkish life in him. When he saw the emaciated Duke of Anhalt in monk’s garb with his beggar’s wallet on his back tottering through the streets of Magdeburg, and everybody held his breath at this magnificent spectacle of advanced Christianity, and then broke forth in profuse eulogies of the princely pilgrim to the glories of monkish sainthood, that left an indelible impression on the fifteen-year-old boy. When he observed the Carthusians at Eisenach, weary and wan with many a vigil,

somber and taciturn, toiling up the rugged steps to a heaven beyond the common heaven; when he talked with the young priests at the towns where he studied, and all praised the life of a monk to this young seeker after perfect righteousness; when in cloister-ridden Erfurt he observed that the monks were outwardly, at least, treated with peculiar reverence, can any one wonder that in a mind longing for peace with God the resolve silently ripened into the act: I will be a monk?

We, too, would call this an act of despair. We would say with Luther: Despair makes monks. But the despair which we mean, and which Luther meant, is genuine spiritual despair. What Catholics call Luther's despair is really desperation, a reckless, dare-devil plunging of a criminal into a splendid Catholic sanctuary. That Luther's act decidedly was not. By Rome's own teaching Luther belonged in the cloister. That mode of life was originally designed to meet the needs of just such minds as his. His entering the monastery was the logical sequence of his previous Catholic tutelage. Rome has this monk on its conscience, and a good many more besides.

As piety went in those days, Luther had been raised a pious young man. He was morally clean. He was a consistent, yea, a scrupulous member of his Church, regular in his daily devotions, reverencing every ordinance of the Church. Also during his student years he kept himself unspotted from the moral contaminations of the academic life. He abhorred the students who were devoted to King Gambrinus and Knight Tannhaeuser. He loathed the taverns and brothels of Erfurt. The Cotta home was no *Bierstube* in his day. The banquet-hall where he met his friends the evening before he entered the cloister was no banquet-hall in the modern sense of the term. That he played the lute at this farewell party, and that there were some "honorable maidens" present, is nowadays related with a wink of the eye by Catholics. But there was nothing wrong in all the proceedings of that evening. It was indeed an honorable gathering. Luther was never a prudish man or fanatic. He loved the decent joys and pleasures of life. Luther gathered his friends about him to take a decent leave of them. He did not run away from them secretly, as many monks have done. He opened up his mind to them at this last meeting. The conversation that ensued was a test of the strength of the convictions he had formed. His was an introspective nature. He had wrestled daily with the sin that ever besets us. He knew that with all his conventional religiousness he could not pass muster before God. Over his wash-basin he was overheard moaning: "The more we wash, the

more unclean we become.” He felt like Paul when he groaned: “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24.) He was sorrowing for his poor soul. He was hungering and thirsting for righteousness. “When will I ever attain to that state of mind that I am sure God is pleased with me?” he mused distractedly. What he could not find while engaged in his secular pursuits, that, he was told, the cloister could give him. To obtain that he entered the monastery. If ever Rome had an honest applicant for monkery, Luther is that man.

Nor did he act precipitately. As shown, the thought of this act had been quietly forming in him for years. When he made his rash vow to St. Anna, he still allowed two weeks to pass before he put his resolution into action. Try and picture to yourself his state of mind during those fourteen days! Moving about in his customary surroundings, he was daily probing the correctness of his contemplated change of life. He fought a soul-battle in those days, and the remembrance of his father made that battle none the easier. From the Catholic standpoint Luther deserves an aureole for that struggle. After entering the cloister, he was still at liberty for a year and a half to retrace his fatal step. But his first impressions were favorable; monkery really seemed to bring him heart’s ease and peace, and there was no one to disabuse his mind of the delusion. After nearly two years in the monastery, while sitting with his father at the cloister board on the event of his ordination to the priesthood, he declares to his father that he enjoys the quiet, contemplative life that he has chosen. Surely, he made a mistake by becoming monk, but Catholics cannot fault him for that mistake. If the life of monks and nuns is really what they claim that it is: the highest and most perfect form of Christianity, they should consistently give any person credit for making the effort to lead that life. In fact, they ought all to turn monks and nuns to honor their own principles.



## 8. Luther's Failure as a Monk

MONASTICISM IS A PAGAN SHOOT grafted on a Christian tree. At its base lies the heathenish notion that sin can be extirpated by severe onslaughts upon the body and the physical life. It has existed in Buddhism before some Christians adopted it. In the early days of Christianity it was proclaimed as superior wisdom by the Platonic philosophers. Like many a lie it has been decked out with Bible-texts to give it respectability, and to soothe disquieted consciences. The Scripture sayings regarding fasting, sexual continence, chastity, crucifying the flesh, etc., are made to stand sponsor for this bastard offspring of the brain of Christian mystics.

With excellent discrimination Mosheim has traced the origin of monasticism to the early Christian fathers. The earliest impulses to monasticism are contained in such writings as the Epistle to Zenas, found among the writings of Justinus, the tracts of Clement of Alexandria on Calumny, Patience, Continence, and other virtues, the tracts of Tertullian on practical duties, such as Chastity, Flight from Persecution, Fasting, Theatrical Exhibitions, the Dress of Females, Prayer, etc. These writings:

"would be perused with greater profit, were it not for the gloomy and morose spirit which they everywhere breathe... In what estimation they ought to be held, the learned are not agreed. Some hold them to be the very best guides to true piety and a holy life; others, on the contrary, think their precepts were the worst possible, and that the cause of practical religion could not be committed to worse hands..."

"To us it appears that their writings contain many things excellent, well considered, and well calculated to kindle pious emotions; but also many things unduly rigorous, and derived from the Stoic and Academic philosophy; many things vague and indeterminate; and many things positively false, and inconsistent with the precepts of Christ. If one deserves the title of a bad master in morals who has no just ideas of the proper boundaries and limitations of Christian duties, nor clear and distinct conceptions of the different virtues and vices, nor a perception of those general principles to which recurrence should be had in all discussions respecting Christian virtue, and therefore very often talks at random, and blunders in expounding the divine laws; though he may say many excellent things, and excite in us considerable emotion; then I can readily admit that in strict truth this title belongs to many of the Fathers...

"They admitted, with good intentions no doubt, yet most inconsiderately, a great error in regard to morals, and pernicious to Christianity; an error which, through all succeeding ages to our times, has produced an infinity of mistakes and evils of various kinds. Jesus, our Savior, prescribed one and the same rule of life or duty to all His disciples. But the Christian doctors, either by too great a desire of imitating the nations among whom they lived, or from a natural propensity to austerity and gloom, (a disease that many labor under in Syria, Egypt, and other provinces of the East,) were induced to maintain that Christ had prescribed a twofold rule of holiness and virtue; the one ordinary, the other extraordinary; the one lower, the other higher; the one for men of business, the other for persons of leisure, and such as desired higher glory in the future world. They therefore early divided all that had been taught them either in books or by tradition, respecting a Christian life and morals, into Precepts and Counsels. They gave the name Precepts to those laws which were universally obligatory, or were enacted for all men of all descriptions; but the Counsels pertained solely to those who aspire after superior holiness and a closer union with God. There soon arose, therefore, a class of persons who professed to strive after that extraordinary and more eminent holiness, and who, of course, resolved to obey the Counsels of Christ, that they might have intimate communion with God in this life, and might, on leaving the body, rise without impediment or difficulty to the celestial world. They supposed many things were forbidden to them which were allowed to other Christians, such as wine, flesh, matrimony, and worldly business. They thought they must emaciate their bodies with watching, fasting, toil, and hunger. They considered it a blessed thing to retire to desert places, and by severe meditation to abstract their minds from all external objects, and whatever delights the senses. Both men and women imposed these severe restraints on themselves, with good intentions, I suppose, but setting a bad example, and greatly to the injury of the cause of Christianity. They were, of course, denominated Ascetics, Zealous Ones, Elect, and also Philosophers; and they were distinguished from other Christians, not only by a different appellation, but by peculiarities of dress and demeanor. Those who embraced this austere mode of life lived indeed only for themselves, but they did not withdraw themselves altogether from the society and converse of men. But in process of time, persons of this description at first retired into deserts, and afterwards formed themselves into associations, after the manner of the Essenes and Therapeutae.

""The causes of this institution are at hand. First, the Christians did not like to appear inferior to the Greeks, the Romans, and the other people among whom there were many philosophers and sages, who were distinguished from the vulgar by their dress and their whole mode of life, and who were held in high honor. Now among these philosophers (as is well known) none better pleased the Christians than the Platonists and Pythagoreans, who are known to have recommended two modes of living, the one for philosophers who wished to excel others in virtue, and the other for people engaged in the common affairs of life. The Platonists prescribed the following rule for philosophers: The mind of a wise man must be withdrawn, as far as possible, from the contagious influence of the body. And as the oppressive load of the body and social intercourse are most adverse to this design, therefore all sensual gratifications are to be avoided; the body is to be sustained, or rather mortified, with coarse and slender fare; solitude is to be sought for; and the mind is to be self-collected and absorbed in contemplation, so as to be detached as much as possible from the body. Whoever lives in this manner shall in the present life have converse with God, and, when freed from the load of the body, shall ascend without delay to the celestial mansions, and shall not need, like the souls of other men, to undergo a purgation. The grounds of this system lay in the peculiar sentiments entertained by this sect of philosophers and by their friends, respecting the soul, demons, matter, and the universe. And as these sentiments were embraced by the Christian philosophers, the necessary consequences of them were, of course, to be adopted also.

“What is here stated will excite less surprise if it be remembered that Egypt was the land where this mode of life had its origin. For that country, from some law of nature, has always produced a greater number of gloomy and hypochondriac or melancholy persons than any other; and it still does so. Here it was long before the Savior’s birth, not only the Essenes and Therapeutae — those Jewish sects, composed of persons with a morbid melancholy, or rather partially deranged — had their chief residence; but many others also, that they might better please the gods, withdrew themselves as by the instinct of nature from commerce with men and with all pleasures of life. From Egypt this mode of life passed into Syria and the neighboring countries, which in like manner always abounded with unsociable and austere individuals: and from the East it was at last introduced among the nations of Europe. Hence the numerous maladies which still deform the Christian world; hence the celibacy of the clergy; hence the numerous herds of monks; hence the two species of life, the theoretical and mystical.” (*Eccles. Hist.*, I, 128 f.)

One may well feel pity for the original monks. Their zeal was heroic, but it was spent upon an issue that is in its very root and core a haughty presumption and a lie. Exhaust all the Scripture-texts which speak of indwelling sin, of the lust that rages in our members, of the duty to keep the body under by fasting and vigilance, and there will not be found enough Bible to cover the nakedness of the monastic principle. Its fundamental thought of a select type of piety to be attained by spectacular efforts at self-mortification flies in the face of the doctrine that we are rid of sin and sanctified by divine grace alone. Monkish holiness is a slander of the Redeemer’s all-sufficient sacrifice for sin and of the work of the Holy

Spirit. It started in paganism, and wants to drag Christianity back into paganism.

But monasticism in Luther's day was no longer of the sort which one may view with a pathetic interest. The old monastic ideals had been largely abandoned. Instead of crucifying the flesh, the monks were nursing and fondling carnal-mindedness. The cloisters had become cesspools of corruption. Because the reputation of monks was utterly bad, and monks were publicly scorned and derided, Luther's friends tried to dissuade him from entering the cloister. That was the reason, too, why Luther's father was so deeply shocked when he heard of what his Martin had done, and Luther had to assure his father that he had not gone into the herd of monks to seek what people believed men sought in that profligate company. For that reason, too, he had chosen the Augustinian order, because a strong reform movement had been started in that order, and its reputation was better than that of the other orders. Luther meant to be a monk of the original type.

Since the days of Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas the Roman Church teaches that there is in the Church a treasury of supererogatory works, that is, of good works which Christ and the saints have performed in excess of what is ordinarily demanded of every man in the way of upright living. We shall meet with this idea again in another connection. It flows from the monastic principles. Monks must have not only enough sanctity for their own needs, but to spare. Of this superfluous sanctity they may make an assignment in favor of others. Do not smile incredulously; monks actually make such assignments. Luther may not have thought of this when he entered the cloister, but he rejoiced in this scheme of substitutive sanctity later. He thought he had found in monkery a goldmine of holiness that would be sufficient not only for himself, but also for his parents. While at Rome some years later, he was in a way sorry that his father and mother were not already in purgatory. He had such a fine chance there to accumulate supererogatory good works which he might have transferred to them to shorten their agonies, or release them entirely.

In order to make a successful monk, one must be either a Pharisee or an epicurean. The Pharisee takes an inventory of the works named in the Law of God, and sets out to perform these in an external, mechanical manner. He adds a few works of his own invention for good measure. Every work performed counts; it constitutes merit. On the basis of his two pecks and a

half of merit the Pharisee now begins to drive a bargain with God: for so much merit he claims so much distinction and glory. He figures it all out to God, so that God shall not make a mistake at the time of the settlement: I have not been this, nor that, nor the other thing; I have done this, and that, and some more. Consequently ...! The epicurean is a jolly fatalist. Whatever is to happen will happen. Why worry? Go along at an even pace; eat, drink, be merry, but for Heaven's sake do not take a serious or tragical view of anything! Take things as they are; if you can improve them, well and good; if not, let it pass; forget it; eat a good meal and go to sleep.

Luther was never an epicurean. The seriousness of life had confronted him at a very early date. The sense of duty was highly developed in him from early youth. In all that he did he felt himself as a being that is responsible to his Maker and Judge. Easy-going indifference and ready self-pity were not in his character. For this Luther is now faulted by Catholics. It is said he extended the rigors of monasticism beyond the bounds of reasonableness. He was too severe with himself. He outraged human nature. Quite correct; but is not monasticism by itself an outrage upon human nature? Luther had endured the monastery for the very purpose of enduring hardness. He did not flinch when the battle into which he had gone commenced in earnest. Luther is said to have been tardy and neglectful in the observance of the rules of the order. Sometimes he would omit the canonical hours, that is, the stated prayers, or some form of prescribed devotion, and then he would endeavor to make up for the loss by redoubled effort, which overtaxed his physical strength. Quite true. It is not such a rare occurrence that a monk forgets the one or the other of the minutiae of the daily monkish routine. The regulations of his orders extended to such things as the posture which he must assume while standing, while sitting, while kneeling; the movement of his arms, of his hands; how to approach, how to move in front of the altar, how to leave it, etc. When his mind was engrossed with the study of the Bible or some commentary of a Church Father, it was easy for Luther to forget parts of the program which he was to carry out. Whenever this happened, was it not his duty to endeavor to repair the damage? Were not penances imposed on him in the confessional for every default? Luther is said to have been led into still deeper gloom by his study of the doctrine of predestination. True, but even this study did not lead Luther off into fatalism. It terrified him, because he studied that profound doctrine without a true perception of divine grace and the

meaning of the Redeemer's work. However, this study did not at any time permanently affect his vigorous striving after holiness.

When Catholics explain Luther's failure as a monk by such assertions, they involve themselves in self-contradiction. By their own principles monkery is not a natural life; yet, when a monk fails in his monkery, they fault him for not being natural. First, they tell the applicant that he must not be what he is, and afterwards they blame him for wanting to be what they told him to be, and what he finds he cannot be. If this is not adding insult to injury, what is? Francis of Assisi became a great saint by that very inhuman treatment of himself for which Luther is censured. But then Francis of Assisi did not quit his order and did not attack the Pope.

The other reason why Luther failed is, because he could not make a Pharisee of himself, which is only another name for hypocrite. The Law of God had such a terrible meaning to him because he applied it as the Lawgiver wants it applied, to his whole inner life, to the heart, the soul, the mind, and all his powers of intellect and will. It is comparatively easy to make the members of the body go through certain external performances, but to make the mind obey is a different proposition. The discovery which disheartened Luther was, that while he was outwardly leading the life of a blameless monk, his inward life was not improved. Sin was ever present with him, as it is with every human being. He felt the terrible smitings of the accusing conscience because he was keenly alive to the real demands of God's Law. The holy Law of God wrought its will upon him to the fullest extent: it roused him to anger with the God who had given this Law to man; it led him into blasphemous thoughts, so that he recoiled with horror from himself. Does the true Law of God, when properly applied, ever have any other effect upon natural man? Paul says: "It worketh wrath" (Rom. 4:15), namely, wrath in man against God. It drives man to despair. That is its legitimate function: No person has touched the essence of the Law who has not passed through these awful experiences. Nor did any man ever flee from the Law and run to Christ for shelter but for these unendurable terrors which the Law begets. That was Luther's whole trouble, and that is why he failed as a monk: he had started out to become a saint, and he did not even succeed in making a Pharisee of himself. If Rome has produced a monk that succeeded better than Luther, he ought to be exhibited and examined. He will be found either an angel or a brazen fraud. He will not be a true man.

## 9. Professor Luther, D. D

CATHOLIC WRITERS greedily grab every opportunity to belittle Luther's scholarship. Incentives to study at home, they say, he received none. His common school education was wretched. During his high school studies he was favored with good teachers, but hampered by his home-bred roughness and uncouthness and his poverty. He applied himself diligently to his studies, but gave no sign of being a genius. At the University of Erfurt, too, he was studious, but he seems to have made no great impression on the University. "He paid little attention to grammatical details, and never attained to Ciceronian purity and elegance in speech and writing." When he made his A. B., he ranked thirteenth in a class of fifty-seven. He did a little better in his effort for the title of A. M., when he came out second among seventeen candidates. But Melanchthon is declared entirely wrong when he relates that Luther was the wonder of the University. His theological studies preparatory to his entering the priesthood were very hasty and superficial. Still less prepared was he for the work of a professor. His duties in the cloister left him little time for learned studies. Yet he went to "bibulous Wittenberg," to a little five-year-old university, and lectured "as best he could." By the way, our Catholic friends seem to forget that "bibulous" Wittenberg was a good old Catholic town at the time. All things considered, Luther's advancement was all too rapid; it was not justified by his preparatory studies, which had been "anything but deep, solid, systematic." "The theological culture he received was not on a par with that required now by the average seminarian, let alone a Doctor of Divinity." He accepted the title of D. D. very reluctantly, being conscious that he did not deserve it. A feeling of the insufficiency of his education tormented him all through life. "It cannot be denied that he was industrious, self-reliant, ambitious, but withal, he was not a methodically trained man. At bottom, he was neither a philosopher nor a theologian, and at no time of his life, despite his efforts to acquire knowledge, did he show himself more than superficially equipped to grapple with serious and difficult philosophical and religious problems.

His study never rose to brilliancy.” Thus runs the Catholic account of Professor and Doctor Luther.

We have not quoted the worst Catholic estimates of Luther’s scholarship. He has also been called a dunce, an ignoramus, a barbarian. Again it seems to escape the Catholics that this ill-trained, insufficient, half-baked Doctor of Divinity is a product of their own educational art. Whatever advancement he received in those days was actually forced upon him by Catholics. All his academic and ecclesiastical honors came from Catholic sources, came to him, moreover, as a good Catholic. Also that highest and noblest distinction which made him a duly called and accredited expounder of the Holy Scriptures. If there is fault to be found with anything in this matter, it lies with the Catholic method and process of making a young man within the space of ten years a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Arts, a priest, a professor, and a Doctor of Sacred Theology; it does not lie with the innocent subject to whom this presto! change! process was applied.

But does this estimate of Luther square with the facts in the case? For a dunce or a mediocre scholar Luther has been a fair success. His little ability and scanty preparation makes his achievements all the more remarkable. The most brilliant minds of the race, for whom the home, the Church and the State, religion, science and art, had done their best, have accomplished immeasurably less than this poor and mostly self-taught country boy. God give His Church many more such dunces!

The net results of Luther’s learning are open to inspection by the world in his numerous works. Able scholars of most recent times have looked into Luther’s writings with a view of determining how much learned knowledge he had actually acquired, even before he began his reformatory work. They have found that Luther was “very well versed in the favorite Latin authors of the day: Vergil, Terence, Ovid, Aesop, Cicero, Livy, Seneca, Horace, Catullus, Juvenal, Silius, Statius, Lucan, Suetonius, Sallust, Quintilian, Varro, Pomponius Mela, the two Plinies, and the *Germania* of Tacitus.” He possessed a creditable amount of knowledge of General History and Church History. He had made a profound study of the leading philosophers and scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages: Thomas of Aquinas, Peter Lombard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Duns Scotus, Occam, Gregory of Rimini, Pierre d’Ailly, Gerson, and Biel. Two of these he knew almost by heart. He had studied the ancient Church Fathers: Irenaeus, Cyprian, Eusebius, Athanasius, Hilary, Ambrose, Gregory of Nanzianzen, Jerome, and such



later theologians as Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great, and Anselm of Canterbury; Tauler, Lefevre, Erasmus, and Pico della Mirandola. “He was quite at home in the exegetical Middle Ages, in the Canon Law, in Aristotle and Porphyry.” “He was one of the first German professors to learn Greek and Hebrew.” Moreover, Luther possessed, besides knowledge, those indispensable requisites in a good professor: “the faculty of plain, clear, correct, and independent thought, resourcefulness, acumen” (Boehmer, p. 179 f.). He had the courage to tell the Church that it was a shame, that a heathen philosopher, Aristotle, should formulate the doctrines which Christians are to believe and their pastors are to teach. He threw this heathen, who had for ages dominated Christian teaching, out of his lecture-room, and took his students straight to the pure fountain of religious truth, the Word of God. He publicly burned the Canon Law by which the Roman Church had forged chains for the consciences of men, and which she upholds to this day. His lecture-room became crowded with eager and enthusiastic students, and the stripling university planted on the edge of civilization in the sands along the Elbe became for a while the religious and theological hub of the world. The students who gathered about Luther knew that they had a real professor in him. The world of his day came to this fledgling doctor with the weightiest questions, and received answers that satisfied. That part of the intelligent world of today which has read and studied Luther endorses the verdict of Luther’s contemporaries as regards his ample learning and proficiency as a teacher.

More learned men, indeed, than Luther there have been. Some of these have also made attempts to introduce needed reforms in the corrupt Roman Church. Rome met their learned and labored arguments with the consummate skill of a past master in sophistry. Those learned efforts came to naught. Rome will never be reformed by human learning and scholarship. Scholars are rarely men of action. It is because Professor Luther taught *and acted* that Rome hates him. He would have been permitted to lecture in peace whatever he wished — others in the universities were doing that at the time — if he had only been careful not to do anything, at least not publicly, against the authority of the Church. That was the unpardonable blunder of Luther that he wanted to live as he believed, and that he taught others to do the same. For this reason he is a dullard, an ignoramus, a poor scholar, a poor writer, in a word, an inferior person from a literary and scholarly point of view.

In Numbers (chap. 22) there is a story told of the prophet Balaam, who went out on a wicked mission for which a great reward had been promised him. He rode along cheerfully, feasting his avaricious heart on the great hoard he would bring back, when suddenly the ass that bore him balked. The prophet began to beat the animal, but it did not budge an inch. All at once this dunce of an ass which had never been put through a spelling-book began to talk and remonstrated with the prophet: "Am I not thine ass? What have I done unto thee that thou hast smitten me?" To his amazement the prophet was able to understand the ass quite well. This dumb brute made its meaning plain to a learned man. It was an intolerable outrage that an ass should lecture a doctor, and balk him in his designs. Luther is that ass. Rome rode him, and he patiently bore his wicked master until the angel of the Lord stopped him and he would go no further. The only difference is that Balaam had his eyes opened, left off beating his ass, and felt sorry for what he had done. Rome's eyes have not been opened for four hundred years. It is still beating the poor ass. It does not see the Lord who has blocked her path and said, You shall go no further!

In 2 Kings, chap. 5, there is another story told of the Syrian captain Naaman, who came to be healed of his leprosy by the prophet Elijah. With his splendid suite the great statesman drove up in grand style to the prophet's cottage. He expected that the holy man would come out to meet him, and very deferentially engage to do the great lord's bidding. The prophet did not even come out of his hut, but sent Naaman word to go and wash seven times in Jordan and he would be cleansed. Now Naaman flew into a rage, because the prophet had, in the first place, not even deigned to speak to him, and, secondly, had ordered a ridiculously commonplace cure for him. He stormed that he would do no such thing as wash in that old Jordan River. He had better waters at home. Let the prophet keep his old Jordan for such as he was. And he rode off in great dudgeon. Rome is the leprous gentleman, and Luther is the man of God who told her how to become clean. The only difference is this: Naaman listened to wise counsel, and finally did what he had been told to do, and was cleansed. Rome disdains to this day to listen to the ill-bred son of a peasant, the theological upstart Luther, and remains as filthy as she has been.

# 10. Luther's "Discovery" of the Bible

SINCE LUTHER'S STUDY OF THE BIBLE has been referred to several times in these pages, it is time that the righteousness of a certain indignation be examined which Catholic writers display. They pretend to be scandalized by the tale that in Luther's time the Bible was such a rare book that it was practically unknown. With the air of outraged innocence some of them rise to protest against the stupid myth that Luther "discovered" the Bible. They claim that their Church had been so eager to spread the Bible, and had published editions of the Bible in such rapid succession, that in Luther's age Christian Europe was full of Bibles. Moreover, that age, they tell us, was an age of intense Bible-study. Not only the theologians, but also the laymen, not only the wealthy and highly educated, but also the common people, had unhindered access to the Bible. The historical data for Rome's alleged zeal in behalf of the Bible these Catholic writers gather largely from Protestant authors. For greater effect they propose to buttress, with the fruits of the laborious research of Protestants, their charge that Luther's ignorance of the Bible was self-inflicted and really inexcusable.

What are the facts in the case? The whole account which we possess of Luther's "discovery" of the Bible is contained in Luther's Table Talk. (22, 897.) This is a book which Luther did not personally compose nor edit. It is a collection of sayings which his guests noted down while at meat with Luther, or afterwards from memory. From a casual remark during a meal Mathesius obtained the information which he published in his biography of Luther, *viz.*, that, when twenty-two years old, Luther one day had found the Bible in a library at Erfurt.

Now, we do not wish to question the general credibility of the Table Talk, nor the authenticity of this particular remark of Luther about his stumbling upon the Bible by accident. But it is certainly germane to our subject to strip the incident of the dramatic features with which Catholic

writers claim that most Protestants still surround the event. Did Luther say, and did Mathesius report, that up to the year 1505 he had not known of the Bible? Not at all. He merely stated that up to that time he had not seen *a complete copy of the Bible*. Luther himself has told scores of times that when a schoolboy at Mansfeld, and later at Magdeburg and Eisenach where he studied, he had heard portions of the Gospels and Epistles read during the regular service at church. Some passages he had learned by heart. Luther's guests would have laughed at him if he had claimed such a "discovery" of the Bible as Catholic writers — and some of their Protestant authorities — think that Mathesius has claimed for him and modern Protestants still credit him with.

What Luther did relate we are prepared to show was not, and could not be, an unusual occurrence in those days.

"Even in the University of Paris, which was considered the mother and queen of all the rest, not a man could be found, when Luther arose, competent to dispute with him out of the Scriptures. This was not strange. Many of the doctors of theology in those times had never read the Bible. Carolstadt expressly tells us this was the case with himself. Whenever one freely read the Bible, he was cried out against, as one making innovations, as a heretic, and exposing Christianity to great danger by making the New Testament known. Many of the monks regarded the Bible as a book which abounded in numerous error." (Mosheim, III, 15.)

The spiritual atmosphere in which Luther and all Christians of his time were brought up was unfavorable to real Bible study.

But before we exhibit the true attitude of Rome toward the Bible, it will be necessary to examine the Catholic claim regarding the extensive dissemination and the intensive study of the Bible among the people in and before Luther's times. Before the age of printing one cannot speak, of course, of "editions" of the Bible. The earliest date for the publication of a printed edition of the Bible is probably 1460— twenty-three years before Luther's birth. That was an event fully as momentous as the opening of the transatlantic cable in our time. Before printing had been invented, the Bible was multiplied by being copied. That was a slow process. Even when a number of copyists wrote at the same time to dictation, it was a tedious process, requiring much time, and not very many would join in such a cooperative effort of Bible production. Besides, few men in those early ages were qualified for this work. A certain degree of literary proficiency was required for the task. The centuries during which the papacy rose to the

zenith of its power are notorious for the illiteracy of the masses. It was considered a remarkable achievement even for a nobleman to be able to scribble his name. Among those who possessed the ability few had the inclination and persistency necessary for the effort to transcribe the Bible. The cloisters of those days were the chief seats of learning and centers of lower education, but even these asylums of piety sheltered many an ignorant monk and others who were afflicted with the proverbial monks' malady — laziness. It is to the credit of the pious members of the Roman Church in that unhappy age that they manifested such a laudable interest in the Bible. The achievement of copying the entire Bible with one's own hand in that age is so great that it palliates some of the glaring evils of the inhuman system of monasticism. But if every monk in every cloister, every priest in every Catholic parish, every professor in every Catholic university, could have produced twenty copies of the Bible during his lifetime, how little would have been accomplished to make the Bible available for the millions of men then living!

Reading is the correlate of writing. The person who cannot write, as a rule, cannot read. For this reason the Bible must have remained a sealed book to many who had ample opportunity to become acquainted with it. The wide diffusion of Bible knowledge which Catholic writers would lead us to believe always existed in the Roman Church is subject to question. It is true that in the first centuries of the Christian era there was a great hunger and thirst for the Word of God. But that was before the Roman Church came into existence. For it is a reckless assumption that the papacy is an original institution in the Church of Christ, and that Roman Catholicism and Christianity are identical. It is also true that in the early days of the Reformation the people manifested a great desire for the Word of God. It was as new to them as it had been to Luther. They would crowd around a person who was able to read, and would listen for hours. At St. Paul's in London public reading of the Bible became a regular custom. But between the early days of Christianity and the beginning of the Reformation lies a period which is known as the Dark Ages. No amount of oratory will turn that age into a Bright Age.

“From the seventh to the eleventh century books were so scarce that often not one could be found in an entire city, and even rich monasteries possessed only a single text-book.”  
(*Universal Encycl.*, 2:96.)

These conditions were not greatly improved until printing was invented. Luther had to do with people who were emerging from the sad conditions of that age, the effects of which were still visible centuries after. He writes:

“The deplorable destitution which I recently observed, during a visitation of the churches, has impelled and constrained me to prepare this Catechism, or Christian Doctrine, in such a small and simple form. Alas, what manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, know nothing at all of Christian doctrine; and many pastors are quite unfit and incompetent to teach. Yet all are called Christians, have been baptized, and enjoy the use of the Sacraments, although they know neither the Lord’s Prayer, nor the Creed, nor the Ten Commandments, and live like the poor brutes and irrational swine.”  
(Preface to the Small Catechism.)

Remember, these people lived in that age when Luther was born and grew up, which Catholic writers picture to us as a Bible-knowing and Bible-loving age.

The invention of printing wrought a mighty change in this respect. This glorious art became hallowed from the beginning by being harnessed for service to the Bible. But even this invention did not at once remove the prevailing ignorance. We must not transfer modern conditions to the fifteenth century. In 1906, one of the many Protestant Bible Societies reported that it had disposed in one year of nearly 80,000,000 Bibles and parts of the Bible in many languages. The Bible is perhaps the cheapest book of modern times. It was not so in the days of Gutenberg, Froschauer, Luft, and the Claxtons. Even after printing had been invented, Bibles sold at prices that would be considered prohibitive in our day. When the Duke of Anhalt ordered three copies of the Bible printed on parchment, he was told that for each copy he must furnish 340 calf-skins, and the expense would be sixty gulden. (Luther’s Works, 21b, 2378.) But even the low-priced editions of the Bible, printed on common paper (which was not introduced into Europe until the thirteenth century), cost a sum of money which a poor man would consider a fortune, and which even the well-to-do would hesitate to spend in days when money was scarce and its purchasing power was considerably different from what it is today. At a period not so very remote from the present a Bible was considered a valuable chattel of which a person would dispose by a special codicil in his will. For generations Bibles would thus be handed down from father to son, not only because of the sacred memories that attached to them as heirlooms, but also because of their actual value in money.

Everything considered, then, we hold the argument that the Bible was a widely diffused book in the days before Luther to be historically untrue, because it implies physical impossibilities. With the magnificent printing and publishing facilities of our times, how many persons are still without the Bible? How many parishioners in all the Catholic churches of this country today own a Bible? The modern Bible societies are putting forth an energy in spreading the Bible that is unparalleled in history. Still their annual reports leave the impression that all they accomplish is as a drop in the bucket over and against the enormous Bible-need still unsupplied. Catholic writers paint the Bible-knowledge of the age before Luther in such exceedingly bright colors that one is led to believe that age surpassed ours. They overshoot their aim. Nobody finds fault with the Roman Church for not having invented the printing-press. All would rather be inclined to excuse her little achievement in spreading the Bible during the Middle Ages on the ground of the poor facilities at her command. Every intelligent and fair person will accord the Roman Church every moiety of credit for the amount of Bible-knowledge which she did convey to the people. We heartily join Luther in his belief that even in the darkest days of the papacy men were still saved in the Roman Church, because they clung in their dying hour to simple texts of the Scriptures which they had learned from their priests. (22:577.) But no one must try and make us believe that the Roman Church before Luther performed marvels in spreading the Bible. She never exhausted even the poor facilities at her command.

Far from wondering, then, that Luther had not seen the complete Bible until his twenty-second year, we regard this as quite natural in view of his lowly extraction, and we consider the censure which superficial Protestant writers have applied to Luther because of his early ignorance of the Bible as uncommonly meretricious. When we bear in mind the known character of the Popes in Luther's days, we doubt whether even they had read the entire Bible. Luther's "discovery" of the Bible, however is not regarded by Protestants as a discovery such as Columbus made when he found the American continent. Luther knew of the existence of the Bible and could cite sayings of the Bible at the time when he found the bulky volume in the library that made such a profound impression upon him.

And yet his find was a true discovery. Luther discovered that his Church had not told him many important and beautiful things that are in the Bible. He became so absorbed with the novel contents of this wonderful book that

the desire was wrung from his heart: Oh, that I could possess this book! But this enthusiastic wish at once became clouded by another discovery which he made while poring over the precious revelation of the very heart of Jesus: his Church had told him things differently from what he found them stated in the Bible. He was shocked when he discovered that in his heart a new faith was springing up which had come to him out of the Bible, — a faith which contradicted the avowed faith of the Roman Church. Poor Luther! He had for the first time come under the influence of that Word which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow (Hebr. 4:12), and he did not know it. Some of the noblest minds in the ages before him have had to pass through the same experience. With the implicit trust which at that time lie reposed in the Roman Church, Luther suppressed his “heretical” thoughts. He said:

“Perhaps I am in error. Dare I believe myself so smart as to know better than the Church?”  
(Hausrath, 1:18.)

Yes, Luther had really discovered the Bible, namely, the Bible which the Roman Church never has been, and never will be, willing to let the people see while she remains what she is today. This “discovery” tale which so offends Catholic writers could be verified in our day. Let Catholic writers put into the hands of every Catholic of America the true, genuine, unadulterated Word of God, without any glosses and comment, and let them watch what is going to happen. There will be astonishing “discoveries” made by the readers, and those discoveries will be no fabrications.



# 11. Rome and the Bible

CATHOLIC WRITERS CLAIM for the Roman Church the distinction which at one time belonged to the Hebrews, that of being the keepers of the oracles of God. They claim that to the jealous vigilance of the Roman Church over the sacred writings of Christianity the world today owes the Bible. The pagan emperors of Rome would have destroyed the Bible in the persecutions which they set on foot against the early Christians, if the faithful martyrs had not refused to surrender their sacred writings. Again, the Roman Church is represented as the faithful custodian of the Bible during the political and social upheaval that wrecked the Roman Empire when the barbarian peoples of the North overran Rome and Greece. Only through the care of the Roman Church the Bible is said to have been saved from destruction in the general confusion.

The reasoning of Catholics on this matter is specious. In the first place, the early Christian martyrs were not Roman Catholics. The claim of the Roman Church that the papacy starts with Peter is a myth. In the second place, much patient labor has been expended in the last centuries to collate existing manuscripts of the Bible for the purpose of removing errors that had crept into the text and making the original text of the Bible as accurate as it is possible to make it. In these labors mostly Protestants were engaged. Fell, Mill, Kuster, Bengel, Wetzstein, Griesbach, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort, have through three centuries of untiring research cooperated in placing before the world the authentic text of the Bible.

Today we have not a single one of the autograph manuscripts of the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament. If the Roman Church existed in the days when Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, Jude, and James wrote, and if she exercised such scrupulous care over the Bible, why has she not preserved a single one of these invaluable documents? We suggest this thought only in view of the unfounded Catholic boast; we do not charge the Catholic Church with a crime for having permitted the autographs of

our Bible to become lost, we only hold that the Catholic Church is not entitled to the eulogies which her writers bestow upon her.

Even the condition of the copies that were made from the autograph writings of the apostles does not speak well for the care which the Roman Church took of the Bible, assuming, of course, that she existed in those early centuries.

“It is evident that the original purity (of the New Testament text) was early lost... Irenaeus (in the second century) alludes to the differences between the copies... Origen, early in the third century, expressly declares that matters were growing worse... From the fourth century onward we have the manuscript text of each century, the writings of the Fathers, and the various Oriental and Occidental versions, all testifying to varieties of readings.”  
(*New Schaff-Herzog Encycl.*, II, 102.)

Our sole purpose in calling attention to this fact, which every scholar today knows, is, to bring the fervor of Catholic admiration for the Bible-protecting and Bible-preserving Church of Rome somewhat within the bounds of reason. We do not charge the Roman Church with having corrupted the text, but if the claim of Catholics as to the age of their Church is correct, every corruption in the copies that were made from the original documents occurred while she was exercising her remarkable custodianship over the Bible. That officials of the Church, especially as we approach the Middle Ages, had something to do with corrupting the sacred text is the belief of the authority just quoted. “The early Church,” he says, “did not know anything of that anxious clinging to the letter which characterizes the scientific rigor and the piety of modern times, and therefore was not bent upon preserving the exact words. Moreover, the first copies were made rather for private than for public use.” Not a few were found in sarcophagi; they had been buried with their owners.

“Copyists were careless, often wrote from dictation, and were liable to misunderstand. Attempted improvements of the text in grammar and style; efforts to harmonize the quotations in the New Testament with the Greek of the Septuagint, but especially to harmonize the Gospels; the writing out of abbreviations; incorporation of marginal notes in the text; the embellishing of the Gospel narratives with stories drawn from non-apostolic, though trustworthy, sources, — it is to these that we must attribute the very numerous ‘readings’ or textual variations. It is true that the copyists were sometimes learned men; but their zeal in making corrections may have obscured the true text as much as the ignorance of the unlearned. The copies, indeed, came under the eye of an official reviser, but he may have sometimes exceeded his functions, and done more harm than good by his changes.”

All this happened while the Roman Church, according to Catholic writers, was keeper of the Bible. The honor which these writers assert for their Church is spurious. If there is any class of men for whom the glory must be vindicated of having given to the world the pure Word of God in a reliable text, it is the band of textual, or lower, critics who have gathered and collated all existing manuscripts of the Bible. What an immense amount of painstaking labor this necessitated the reader can guess from the fact that for the New Testament alone about 3,000 manuscripts had to be examined word for word and letter for letter. The men who undertook this gigantic task, and who are always on the watch for new finds, do not belong in the Roman fold, and did not receive the incentive for their work from the Roman Church. This work started soon after the Reformation, and the intense interest aroused in God's Word by that movement is the true cause of it. The Protestant Church, not the Church of Rome, has given back to the world the pure Word of God in more than one sense.

The official Bible of the Roman Church today is the Latin Vulgate. This Bible, which is a revision by Jerome and others of many variant Latin texts in use towards the end of the fourth century, has been elevated to the dignity of the inspired text. The original purpose was good: it was to remove the confusion of many conflicting texts and to establish uniformity in quoting the Bible. The errors of the Vulgate are many, but while it was understood that the Vulgate was merely a translation, the errors could be corrected from the original sources. Little, however, was done in this respect before the Reformation, and since then the Roman Church has become rigid and petrified in its adherence to this Latin Bible. In its fourth session (April 8, 1546) the Council of Trent decreed that "of all Latin editions the old and vulgate edition be held as authoritative in public lectures, disputations, sermons, and expositions; and that no one is to dare or presume under any pretext to reject it." "The meaning of this decree," says Hodge:

"...is a matter of dispute among Romanists themselves. Some of the more modern and liberal of their theologians say that the council simply intended to determine which among several Latin versions was to be used in the service of the Church. They contend that it was not meant to forbid appeal to the original Scriptures, or to place the Vulgate on a par with them in authority. The earlier and stricter Romanists take the ground that the Synod did intend to forbid an appeal to the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, and to make the Vulgate the ultimate authority. The language of the council seems to favor this interpretation." (Koestlin, I, 455.)

We might add, the practice of Romanists, too. At the debate in Leipzig Eck contended that the Latin Vulgate was inspired by the Holy Ghost.

Whatever knowledge of Scripture the people in the Middle Ages possessed was confined to those who could read Latin. Catholic writers claim this was at that time the universal language of Europe, but they wisely add: “among the educated.” One of them says: “Those who could read Latin could read the Bible, and those who could not read Latin could not read anything.” Exactly. And now, to prove the wide diffusion of Bible-knowledge in their Church before Luther, these Catholic writers should give us some exact data as to the extent of the Latin scholarship in that age. Fact is, the Latin tongue acted as a lock upon the Scriptures to the common people. Hence arose the desire to have the Bible translated into the vernacular of various European countries.

This desire Rome sought to suppress with brutal rigor. The bloody persecutions of the Waldensians in France, which almost resulted in the extirpation of these peaceful mountain people, of the followers of Wyclif in England, whose remains Rome had exhumed after his death and burned, of the Hussites in Bohemia, were all aimed at translations of the Bible into the languages which the common people understood.

In July, 1199, Pope Innocent III issued a breve, occasioned by the report that parts of the Bible were found in French translation in the diocese of Metz. The breve praises in a general way the zeal for Bible-study, but applies to all who are not officially appointed to engage in such study the prohibition in Ex. 19:12, 13, not to touch the holy mountain of the Law. During the reign of his successor, Honorius III, in 1220, laymen in Germany were forbidden to read the Bible.

Under Gregory IX the same prohibition was issued, in 1229, to laymen in Great Britain.

In the same year the crusades against the Albigenses were concluded, and the Council of Toulouse issued a severe order, making it a grave offense for a layman to possess a Bible.

In 1234, the Synod of Tarragona demanded the immediate surrender of all translations of the Bible for the purpose of having them burned.

In 1246, the Synod of Baziers issued a prohibition forbidding laymen to possess any theological books whatsoever, and even enjoining the clergy from owning any theological books written in the vernacular.

Eleven years after Luther's death, in 1557, Pope Paul IV published the Roman Index of Forbidden Books, and, with certain exceptions, prohibited laymen from reading the Bible.

Not until the reign of King Edward VI was the "Act inhibiting the reading of the Old and New Testament in English tongue, and the printing, selling, giving, or delivering of any such other books or writings as are therein mentioned and condemned" (namely, in 34 Hen. VIII. Cap. 1) abrogated.

The Council of Trent ordered all Catholic publishers to see to it that their editions have the approval of the respective bishop.

Not until February 28, 1759, did Pope Clement XIII give permission to translate the Bible *into all the languages of the Catholic states*.

Not until November 17, 1893, did Pope Leo XIII issue an encyclical enjoining upon Catholics the study of the Bible, always, however, *in editions approved by the Roman Church*. (Kurtz, *Kirchengesch.* II, 2, 94. 217; *Univers. Encycl.*, under title "Bible"; Peter Heylyn, *Ecclesia Restaurata* I, 99; Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 1429. 1439. 1567. 1607.)

Catholic writers seek to make a great impression in favor of their Church by enumerating, on the authority of Protestant scholars, the number of German translations of the Bible that are known to have been in existence before Luther. But they omit to inform the public that not a single one of those translations obtained the approbation of a bishop. One cannot view but with a pathetic interest these sacred relics of an age that was hungering for the Word of God. The origin of these early German Bibles has been traced by scholars to Wycliffite and Hussite influences, which Rome never stamped out, though her inquisitors tried their best to do so. The earliest of these Bibles do not state the place nor the year of publication. Can the reader guess why? They were not published at the seat of the German Archbishop, Mainz, but most of them at the free imperial city of Augsburg. Can the reader suggest a reason? Many of them are printed in abnormally small sizes, facilitating quick concealment. Can the reader imagine a cause for this phenomenon? In these old German Bibles particular texts are emphasized, for example, Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 4:9; 2 Cor. 4:8 ; 11:23; 1 Pet. 2:19; 4:16; 5:9; Acts 5:18. 41; 8:1; 12:4; 14:19. If the reader will take the trouble to look up these texts, he will find that they warn Christians to be prepared to be persecuted for their faith. Has the reader ever heard of such an officer of the Roman Church as the inquisitor, one of whose duties it was

to hunt for Bibles among the people? In places these old German Bibles contain significant marginal glosses, for example, at 1 Tim. 2:5 one of them has this gloss: “*Ain* mitler Christus, ach merk!” that is: *One* mediator, Christ — note this well!

In 1486, Archbishop Berchtold of Mainz, Primate of Germany, issued an edict, full of impassioned malice against German translations of the Bible, and against laymen who sought edification from them. He says that “no prudent person will deny that there is need of many supplements and explanations from other writings” than the Bible, to the end, namely, that a person may construe from the German Bibles the true Catholic faith. Fact is, that faith is not in the Bible. This happened three years after the birth of Luther. (Kurtz, II, 2:304.)

Instead of finding fault, then, with Luther’s ignorance of the Bible prior to 1505, we feel surprised that the young man knew as much of the Bible as he did. He must in this respect have surpassed many in his age.

The Roman Church does not permit her laymen to read a Bible that she has not published with annotations. “Believing herself to be the divinely appointed custodian and interpreter of Holy Writ,” says a writer in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (II, 545), “she cannot, without turning traitor to herself, approve the distribution of Scripture ‘without note or comment.’” For this reason the Roman Church has cursed the Bible societies which early in the eighteenth century began to be formed in Protestant Churches, and aimed at supplying the poor with cheap Bibles. In 1816, Pope Pius VII anathematized all Bible societies, declaring them “a pest of Christianity,” and renewed the prohibition which his predecessors had issued against translations of the Bible. (Kurtz, II, 2:94.) Leo XII, on May 5:1824, in the encyclical *Ubi Primum*, said:

“Ye are aware, venerable brethren, that a certain Bible society is impudently spreading throughout the world, which, despising the traditions of the holy Fathers and the decree of the Council of Trent, is endeavoring to translate, or rather to pervert, the Scriptures into the vernacular of all nations... It is to be feared that by false interpretation the Gospel of Christ will become the gospel of men, or, still worse, the gospel of the devil.”

Pius IX, on November 9, 1846, in the encyclical *Qui Pluribus*, said:

“These crafty Bible societies, which renew the ancient guile of heretics, cease not to thrust their Bible upon all men, even the unlearned — their Bibles, which have been translated against the laws of the Church and after certain false explanations of the text. Thus the divine traditions, the teaching of the fathers, and the authority of the Catholic Church are rejected, and every one in his own way interprets the words of the Lord, and distorts their meaning, thereby falling into miserable error.” (*Cath. Encycl.* II, 545.)

The writer whom we have just quoted says: “The fundamental fallacy of private interpretation of the Scriptures is presupposed by the Bible societies.” These papal pronunciamentos are directed chiefly against the Canstein Bibelgesellschaft and her later sisters, such as the Berliner Bibelgesellschaft, and against the British and American Bible Societies.

The face of the Roman Church is sternly set against the plain text of the Scriptures. To defeat the meaning of the original text, she not only mutilates the text and adds glosses which twist the meaning of the text into an altogether different meaning, but she declares that the Bible is not the only source from which men must obtain revealed truth. Alongside of the Bible she places an unwritten word of God, her so-called traditions. These, she claims, are divine revelations which were handed down orally from generation to generation. The early fathers and the councils of the Church referred to them in defining the true doctrine and prescribing the correct practice of the Church. Nobody has collected these traditions, and nobody will. But to what extent the Roman Church operates with them, is well known.

Speaking of learned Bible-study in the Middle Ages, Mosheim says:

“Nearly all the theologians were *Positivi* and *Sententiarii* [that is, they taught what the Church ordered to be taught], who deemed it a great achievement, both in speculative and practical theology, either to overwhelm the subject with a torrent of quotations from the fathers, or to anatomize it according to the laws of dialectics [that is, the laws of reasoning, logic]. And whenever they had occasion to speak of the meaning of any text, they appealed invariably to what was called the *Glossa Ordinaria* [that is, the official explanation], and the phrase *Glossa dicit* (the Gloss says), was as common and decisive on their lips as anciently the phrase *Ipse dixit* (he, viz., the teacher, has said) in the Pythagorean school.” (III, 15.)

In his controversies with the theologians of Rome, Luther found that they were constantly wriggling out of the plain text of the Bible and running for shelter to the traditions, to the fathers, to the decrees of councils of the Church.

At the Council of Trent some one rose to inquire whether all the traditions recognized as genuine by the Church could not be named; he was told that he was out of order. (Pallavivini, VI, 11:9; 18:7.) Hase has invited the Roman Church to say whether all the traditions are now known. He has not been answered. (*Protest. Polem.*, p. 83.) If Romanists answer: Yes, the reasonable request will be made of them to publish those traditions once for all time, in order that men may know all that God is supposed to have really said to men that is not in the Bible. If they answer: No, the conclusion is inevitable that the Christian faith is an uncertain thing. Any tradition may bob up that upsets a part of the Creed.

Add to this the dogma of papal infallibility, promulgated July 18:1870, which asserts for the Pope “the entire plenitude of supreme power” to determine the faith and morals of Christians, and we have reached a point where it becomes plain to any thoughtful person that the Bible is, from the Catholic view-point, not at all such a necessary book as men have believed. Nor can the faith of a Romanist be a fixed and stable quantity. Any papal deliverance may bring about a change, and the conscientious Catholic must study the news from the Vatican with the same vital interest as the merchant studies the market reports in his morning paper, and a very pertinent question that he may ask his wife over his coffee at the breakfast table would be, “Wife, what do we believe today?”



## 12. Luther's Visit at Rome

CATHOLIC WRITERS ask the world not to believe Luther's tales about the city of Rome. Luther, they say, came to Rome as a callow rustic comes to a metropolis. To the wily Italians he was German Innocence Abroad; they hoaxed him by telling him absurd tales about the Popes, the priests, the wonders of the city, etc., and the credulous monk believed all they told him. He left Rome with his faith in the Church unimpaired. Later in life, after his "defection" from Rome, he told as true facts and as reminiscences of his visit at the Holy City many of the false stories which had been palmed off on him. This is said to have given rise to the prevailing Protestant view that during his visit at Rome Luther's eyes were opened to the corruption of the Roman Church and his resolution formed to overthrow that Church. Luther himself is said to be responsible for this false view. He fostered it by his tales of what he had seen and heard at Rome with disgust and horror. His horrid impressions are declared pure fiction, and simply serve to show how little the man can be trusted in anything he states.

To leave a way open for a decent retreat, Catholics also point to a difference in temperament between the phlegmatic Luther coming from a northern clime, which through its atmospheric rigors begets somber reflections and gloomy thoughts, and the airy, fairy Italians, who revel in sunshine, flowers, and fruits, drink fiery wines, and naturally grow up into a freedom of manners and lack of restraint that is characteristic of people living in southern climes. All of which means — if it means anything serious — that the Ten Commandments are subject to revision according to the geographic latitude in which a person happens to be. When your austere gentleman, raised among the fens and bogs of the Frisian coast, sees something in a grove in Sicily which he denounces as wicked, you must tell him that there is nothing wrong in what he has seen. He has only omitted to adjust his temperament to the locality. If you follow out this line of thought to the end, you will come to a point where you strike hands with Rudyard Kipling, who has sung enthusiastically about a certain locality beyond Aden

where the Ten Commandments do not exist. And to think that this plea is made by people who have charged Luther with having put the Ten Commandments out of commission for himself and others! Italians, lovers of freedom and unrestraint, were the first to fill the world with tales about the moral besottedness of Luther! This goes to show that in any application of the Ten Commandments it matters very much who does the applying.

We have in a previous chapter briefly reviewed the Popes that were contemporaries of Luther. Their character was stamped on the life of the Holy City: The Popes and their following gave Rome its moral, or immoral, face. The chroniclers of those days have described the existing conditions. Luther need not have said one word about what wicked things he had seen and heard at Rome, either ten years, or twenty years, or thirty years after he had been there, and the world would still know the record of the residence of the Popes. Luther really saw very little of what he might have seen, and it is probable that he has told less. But what he did see and hear are facts. He did not grasp their full meaning nor see their true bearing at the time. The real import of his Roman experiences dawned on him at a later period. He spoke as a man of things that he had seen as a child. But that does not alter the facts.

Luther was shocked at the levity of Italian monks who were babbling faulty Latin prayers which they did not understand and remarked laughing to him: "Never mind; the Holy Ghost understands us, and the devil flees apace."

Luther's confidence in the boasted unity of the Roman Church was somewhat shaken when he discovered that he could not read mass in any church in the territory at Milan, because there the Ambrosian form of service was prescribed while he had been trained to the Gregorian. Luther shook his head at the freedom of certain public manners of the Italians which reminded him of dogs and of what he had read about Kerkyra. Luther heard of a Lenten collation, probably at the abbey of San Benedetto de Larione, where the word "fast" had to be spelled with an *e* as the second letter. The loquaciousness, spicy talk, blasphemy, dishonesty, treachery, quarrelsomeness, and deadly animosities of the Italians, Luther regards as strange, considering that they live so near to the Holy City. He wondered why the Italians do not permit their women to go out of their houses except deeply veiled.

He finds that the Italians show no respect for their beautiful churches and the divine service conducted in them. Even on great festivals the magnificent cathedrals are almost empty, the worshipers are chatting with one another while the service is in progress. Even quarrels are settled at these holy places, sometimes with the knife. When there is a burial, they hurry the corpse to the grave, not even the relatives being in attendance.

He is grieved at the irreligious manner in which the priests at Rome read mass. They hurry through the performance with incredible rapidity. They crowd each other away from the altar in their haste to get their performance finished. "Hurry, hurry! Begone! Come away!" he hears them calling to one-another. Sometimes two priests are reading mass at one altar at the same time. They had finished the whole mass before Luther had reached the Gospel in the service of the mass. And then they would receive money from the bystanders who had come in and had watched them. In a half hour a priest could get a handful of silver. Luther refused such gifts.

Luther heard few preachers at Rome, and those that he heard he did not like. They were very lively in the delivery of their sermons, they would run to and fro in their pulpit, bend far over toward the audience, utter violent cries, change their voice suddenly, and gesticulate like madmen.

Luther saw Pope Julius from a distance several times. He thought it queer that a healthy and strong man like the Pope should have himself carried to church in a litter instead of walking thither, and that such show should be made of his going there and a procession should be formed to accompany him. He saw the Pope sit at the altar and hold out his foot to be kissed by people. He saw the Pope take communion. He did not kneel like other communicants, but sat on his magnificent throne; a cardinal priest handed him the chalice, and he sipped the wine through a silver tube.

However, these and other things did not at the time shake Luther's belief in the Catholic Church. He came to Rome and left Rome a devout Catholic. Staupitz, the vicar of his order, had really gratified him in permitting him to go to Rome as the traveling companion of another monk. Luther had expressed the wish to make a general confession at Rome. With this thought on his mind he started out, and he treated the whole journey as a pilgrimage. After the manner of pious monks the two companions walked one behind the other, reciting prayers and litanies. Whether his general confession and his first mass at Rome, probably at Santa Maria del Popolo, gave him that sense of spiritual satisfaction which he craved, he has not told

us. When he had come in sight of the city, he had fallen on his face like the crusaders in sight of Jerusalem, and had fervently blessed that moment. Now he ran through the seven stations of Rome, read masses wherever he could, gathered an abundance of indulgences by going through prescribed forms of worship at many shrines, listened to miracle-tales, knelt before the veil of St. Veronica near the Golden Gate at San Giovanni and before the bronze statue of St. Peter in the chapel of St. Martin, where a crucifix had of its own accord raised itself up and become transfixed in the dome, saw the rope with which Judas hanged himself fastened to the altar of the Apostles Simon and Judas at St. Peter's, the stone in the chapel of St. Petronella on which the penitential tears of Peter had fallen, cutting a groove in it two fingers wide, had the guide show him the Pope's crown, the tiara, which, he thought, cost more money than all the princes of Germany possessed, was perplexed at finding the heads and bodies of Peter and Paul assigned to different places, at the Lateran Church and at San Paolo Fuori, mounted the Scala Santa — Pilate's staircase — on his knees, passed with awe the relief picture in one of the streets which the popular legend declared to be that of the female Pope Johanna and her child, saw the ancient pagan deities of Rome depicted in Santa Maria della Rotonda, the old Pantheon, stared at the head of John the Baptist in San Silvestro in Capite, tried, but failed to read the famous Saturday mass at San Giovanni, the oldest and greatest sanctuary of Christianity, rested from a fatiguing tour through the Lateran in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, where Pope Sylvester II, the Faustus of the Italians, was carried away by the devils, went through the catacombs with its 6 martyred Popes and 176,000 other martyrs, etc., etc.

Looking back to this visit later, Luther remarked, "I believed everything" Just what official Rome expected every devout pilgrim to do, just what it expects them to do today. And these Romanists want to point the finger of ridicule at the simpleton, the easy dupe, the holy fool Luther! Does Rome perhaps think the same of all the pious pilgrims that annually crowd Rome? Luther heard himself called "un buon Cristiano" at Rome and discovered that that meant as much as "an egregious ass." But he considered that a part of Italian wickedness. The Church, he was sure, approved of all that he did, in fact, had taught him to do all that. It required ten years or more to disabuse his mind of the frauds that had been practiced on him, and then he declared that he would not take 100,000 gulden not to have seen with his

own eyes how scandalously the Popes were hoodwinking Christians. If it were not for his visit at Rome, he says, he might fear that he was slandering the Popes in what he wrote about them.

While Luther's visit at Rome, then, brought about no spiritual change in him, it helped to give him a good conscience afterwards when his conflict with Rome had begun.

# 13. Pastor Luther

LUTHER'S FAMOUS PROTEST against the sale of indulgences, published October 31, 1517, in the form of ninety-five theses, is represented by Catholic writers as an outburst of Luther's violent temper and an assault upon the Catholic Church that he had long premeditated. By this time, it is said, Luther had become known to his colleagues as a quarrelsome man, loving disputations and jealous of victory in a debate. His methods of teaching at the university were novel, in defiance of the settled customs of the Church. His dangerous innovations caused the suspicion to spring up that he was plotting rebellion against the authority of the Church. The arrival of the indulgence-hawker Tetzl in the neighborhood of Wittenberg gave him the long-looked-for occasion to strike a blow at the sacred teachings of the Church which he had solemnly promised to support and defend against all heretics, and from whose teachings he had already apostatized in his heart.

The fact is that Luther was so little conscious of an intention to stir up strife for his Church that he was probably the most surprised man in Germany when he observed the excitement which his Theses were causing. The method he had chosen for voicing his opinion had no revolutionary element in it. It was an invitation to the learned doctors to debate with him the doctrinal grounds for the sale of indulgences. Catholic writers point to the fact that Luther declared at a later time that he did not know what an indulgence was when he attacked Tetzl. They seek to prove from this remark of Luther that it was not conscientious scruples, but the desire to cause trouble in the Church that prompted Luther to his action. They do not see that this remark speaks volumes for Luther. By his Theses he meant to get at the truth of the teaching concerning indulgences. His Theses were written in Latin, not in the people's language. Others translated them into German and scattered them broadcast throughout Germany. The Theses are no labored effort to set up, by skillful, logical argument and in carefully chosen terms, a new dogma in opposition to the teaching of the Church, but

they are exceptions hurriedly thrown on paper, like the notes jotted down by a speaker to guide him in a discussion of his subject. Last, not least, the Theses, while contradicting the prevailing practice of selling indulgences, breathe loyalty to the Catholic Church. From our modern standpoint Luther appears in the Theses as half Protestant, or evangelical, half Roman Catholic. In his own view he was altogether Catholic. His Theses were merely a call: Let there be light! Let our consciences be duly instructed!

We still have a letter which Luther wrote to Pope Leo X about six months after he had published the Theses. This letter shows in what an orderly and quiet way Luther proceeded in his attack upon the traffic in indulgences, and how much he believed himself in accord with the Pope and the Church. We shall quote a few statements from this letter:

"In these latter days a jubilee of papal indulgences began to be preached, and the preachers, thinking everything allowed them under the protection of your name, dared to teach impiety and heresy openly, to the grave scandal and mockery of ecclesiastical powers, totally disregarding the provisions of the Canon Law about the misconduct of officials...

"They met with great success, the people were sucked dry on false pretenses,...but the oppressors lived on the fat and sweetness of the land. They avoided scandals only by the terror of your name, the threat of the stake, and the brand of heresy, ...if, indeed, this can be called avoiding scandals and not rather exciting schisms and revolt by crass tyranny...

"I privately warned some of the dignitaries of the Church. By some the admonition was well received, by others ridiculed, by others treated in various ways, for the terror of your name and the dread of censure are strong. At length, when I could do nothing else, I determined to stop their mad career if only for a moment; I resolved to call their assertions in question. So I published some propositions for debate, inviting only the more learned to discuss them with me, as ought to be plain to my opponents from the preface to my Theses. [This was, by the way, a common practice in those days among the learned professors at universities.] Yet this is the flame with which they seek to set the world on fire! . . ."

(15:401; transl. by Preserved Smith.)

Luther's publication of the Theses was the act of a conscientious Christian pastor. Being a priest, Luther had to hear confession. Through the confessional he learned how the common people viewed the indulgences: they actually believed that by buying indulgences they were freed from all the guilt and punishment of their sins. Absolution became a plain business transaction: you pay your money and you take your goods. Luther wrote this to his archbishop the same day on which he published his Theses.

“Papal indulgences,” he says in the letter to Albert, Archbishop of Mayence and Primate of Germany:

“...for the building of St. Peter’s are hawked about under your illustrious sanction. I do not now accuse the sermons of the preachers who advertise them, for I have not seen the same, but I regret that the people have conceived about them the most erroneous ideas. Forsooth, these unhappy souls believe that, if they buy letters of pardon, they are sure of their salvation; likewise, that souls fly out of purgatory as soon as money is cast into the chest; in short, that the, grace conferred is so great that there is no sin whatever which cannot be absolved thereby, even if, as they say, taking an impossible example, a man should violate the mother of God. They also believe that indulgences free them from all penalty and guilt.” (15, 391; transl. by Preserved Smith, p. 42.)

Luther had preached against the popular belief in indulgences, pilgrimages to shrines of the saints and their relics, for two years before he published his Theses. He was confident that the Church could not countenance this belief. Forgiveness of sins is to the penitent in heart who are sorry for their sins, and their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who atoned for them, and in whom we have the forgiveness of sin by the redemption through His blood. This is the Scriptural doctrine of penitence, — that sorrowful, contrite, and believing attitude of the heart which is the characteristic of true Christians throughout their lives. Through penitence we become absolved in the sight of God from all guilt and punishment of our sins, and the minister, by announcing this fact, is to convey to the penitent the assurance that his sins have been forgiven. Whatever penances or pious exercises the Church may impose on sinners who have confessed their sins can only be imposed as a wholesome disciplinary measure and as aids to the needed reformation of life. These penances, since they originate in the choice of the Church, may also be remitted by the Church, and for these penances the Church may accept a commutation in money, which payment, however, cannot supersede the paramount duty of the penitent to amend his sinful conduct. Such were Luther’s views in brief outline at the time he published his Theses. If we are to take modern Catholic critics of Luther seriously, that has also been the teaching of their Church on the subject of indulgences. They claim that the good intentions of the Popes were grossly misinterpreted and the system of indulgences was put to uses for which it was never intended. If that is the case, why do they attack Luther for his attempt to have the abuses corrected? According to their own presentation of the true teaching of the Church on the subject of indulgences, Luther was



the most dutiful son of the Church in his day in what he did on All Souls' Eve, 1517.

But the Roman teaching on indulgences is not such an innocent affair as Catholics would have us believe. The practice of substituting for penances some good work or contribution to a pious purpose had arisen in the Church at a very early time. "This," says Preserved Smith, who has well condensed the history of indulgences, "was the seed of indulgence which would never have grown to its later enormous proportions had it not been for the crusades. Mohammed promised his followers paradise if they fell in battle against unbelievers, but Christian warriors were at first without this comforting assurance. Their faith was not long left in doubt, however, for as early as 855 Leo IV promised heaven to the Franks who died fighting against the Moslems. A quarter of a century later John VIII proclaimed absolution for all sins and remission of all penalties to soldiers in the holy war, and from this time on the 'crusade indulgence' became a regular means of recruiting, used, for example, by Leo IX in 1052 and by Urban II in 1095. By this time the practice had grown up of regarding an indulgence as a remission not only of penance, but of the pains of purgatory. The means which had proved successful in getting soldiers for the crusade were first used in 1145 or 1146 to get money for the same end, pardon being assured to those who gave enough to fit out one soldier on the same terms as if they had gone themselves.

"When the crusades ceased, in the thirteenth century, indulgences did not fall into desuetude. At the jubilee of Pope Boniface VIII, in 1300, a plenary indulgence was granted to all who made a pilgrimage to Rome. The Pope reaped such an enormous harvest from the gifts of these pilgrims that he saw fit to employ similar means at frequent intervals, and soon extended the same privileges as were granted to pilgrims to all who contributed for some pious purpose at their own homes. Agents were sent out to sell these pardons, and were given power to confess and absolve, so that in 1393 Boniface IX was able to announce complete remission of both guilt and penalty to the purchasers of his letters.

"Having assumed the right to free living men from future punishment, it was but a step for the Popes to proclaim that they had the power to deliver the souls of the dead from purgatory. The existence of this power was an open question until decided by Calixtus III in 1457, but full use of the faculty was not made until twenty years later, after which it became of all branches of the indulgence trade the most profitable."

The reader will note that the indulgence trade in its latest form had not become a general thing until about six years before Luther's birth. It was a

comparatively new thing that Luther attacked. In our remarks on monasticism in a previous chapter we alluded to the Roman teaching concerning the Treasure of the Merits of the Saints, or the Treasure of the Church. This teaching greatly fructified the theory of indulgences. It has never been shown, and never will be, how this Treasure originates. In the work of our Redeemer there was nothing superabundant that the Scriptures name. He fulfilled the entire Law for man, and His merits are of inestimable value. But they were all needed for the work of satisfying divine justice. Moreover, all these merits of Christ are freely given to each and every believer and cancel all his guilt, according to the statement of Paul: "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth." As regards the merits of the saints, which they accumulated by doing good works in excess of what they were required to do, this is a purely imaginary asset of the papal bank of Rome. Every man, with all that he is and has and is able to do, owes himself wholly to God. At the best he can only do his duty. There is no chance for doing good works in excess of duty. If he were really to do all, he would only do what it was his duty to do, Luke 17:10, and would be told to regard himself, even in that most favorable case, as an unprofitable servant.

But supposing there were superabundant merits, supererogatory works of Christ and the saints, who has determined their quantity? Who takes the inventory of this stock of the papal bank of Rome? Is he the same party who determines the length of a person's stay in purgatory and can tell how much he has been in arrears in the matter of goodness and virtuousness, and how much cash will purchase his release? How is this intelligence conveyed to purgatory that Mr. So-and-so is free to proceed to heaven? A multitude of such questions arising in all thinking minds that want to arrive at rock bottom facts in so serious a matter always baffle the theologians of Rome. They owe the world an answer on these questions for four hundred years. Is the world doing Rome an injustice when it regards the sale of indulgences a pure confidence game in holy disguise, the offer of a fictitious value for good cash, the boldest and baldest gold-bricking that mankind has been subjected to?

The sale of indulgences which was started in Luther's days was a particularly offensive enterprise. "It was not so much the theory of the Church that excited Luther's indignation as it was the practices of some of her agents. They encouraged the common man to believe that the purchase

of a papal pardon would assure him impunity without any real repentance on his part. Moreover, whatever the theoretical worth of indulgences, the motive of their sale was notoriously the greed of unscrupulous ecclesiastics. The 'holy trade' as it was called had become so thoroughly commercialized by 1500 that a banking house, the Fuggers of Augsburg, were the direct agents of the Curia in Germany. In return for their services in forwarding the Pope's bulls, and in hiring sellers of pardons, this wealthy house made a secret agreement in 1507 by which it received one-third of the total profits of the trade, and in 1514 formally took over the whole management of the business in return for the modest commission of one-half the net receipts. Naturally not a word was said by the preachers to the people as to the destination of so large a portion of their money, but enough was known to make many men regard indulgences as an open scandal.

"The history of the particular trade attacked by Luther is one of special infamy. Albert of Brandenburg, a prince of the enterprising house of Hohenzollern, was bred to the Church and rapidly rose by political influence to the highest ecclesiastical position in Germany. In 1513, he was elected, at the age of twenty-three, Archbishop of Magdeburg and administrator of the bishopric of Halberstadt, — an uncanonical accumulation of sees confirmed by the Pope in return for a large payment. Hardly had Albert paid this before he was elected Archbishop and Elector of Mayence and Primate of Germany (March 9, 1514). As he was not yet of canonical age to possess even one bishopric, not to mention three of the greatest in the empire, the Pope refused to confirm his nomination except for an enormous sum. The Curia at first demanded twelve thousand ducats for the twelve apostles. Albert offered seven for the seven deadly sins. The average between apostles and sins was struck at ten thousand ducats, or fifty thousand dollars, a sum equal in purchasing power to near a million today. Albert borrowed this, too, from the Fuggers, and was accordingly confirmed on August 15, 1514.

"In order to allow the new prelate to recoup himself, Leo obligingly declared an indulgence for the benefit of St. Peter's Church, to run eight years from March 31:1515. By this transaction, one of the most disgraceful in the history of the papacy, as well as in that of the house of Brandenburg, the Curia made a vast sum. Albert did not come off so well. First, a number of princes, including the rulers of both Saxonies, forbade the trade in their dominions, and the profits of what remained were deeply cut by the unexpected attack of a young monk." (Preserved Smith, p. 86 ff.)

Luther had ample reason to dread the demoralizing effect of the indulgence-vendors' activity upon the common people. In the sermons of Tetzl the church where he happened to do business was raised to equal dignity with St. Peter's at Rome. Instead of confessing to an ordinary priest, he told the masses they had now the rare privilege of confessing to an Apostolical Vicar, specially detailed for this work. With consummate skill he worked on the tender feelings of parents, of mothers, who were mourning the loss of children, or of children who had lost their parents. He impersonated the departed in their agonies in purgatory, he made the people hear the pitiful moaning of the victims in the purgatorial fires, and transmitted their heartrending appeals for speedy help to the living. He clinched the argument by playing on the people's covetousness: for the fourth part of a gulden they could transfer a suffering soul safely to the home of the eternal paradise. Had they ever had a greater bargain offered to them? Never would they have this indispensable means of salvation brought within easier reach. Now was the time, now or never! "O ye murderers, ye usurers, ye robbers, ye slaves of vice," he cried out, "now is the time for you to hear the voice of God, who does not desire the death of the sinner, but would have the sinner repent and live. Turn, then, O Jerusalem, to the Lord, thy God!" He declared that the red cross of the indulgence-vendors, with the papal arms, raised in a church, possessed the same virtue as the cross of Christ. If Peter were present in person, he would not possess greater authority, nor could he dispense grace more effectually than he. Yea, he would not trade his glory as an indulgence-seller with Peter's glory; for he had saved more souls by selling the indulgences than Peter by preaching. Every time a coin clinked in his money chest a liberated soul was soaring to heaven.

Catholic writers declare that the people were told that they must repent in order to obtain forgiveness. So they were, in the manner aforesaid. Repenting meant buying a letter of pardon from the Pope. That is the reason why Luther worded the first two of his Ninety-five Theses as he did: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in saying: *Poenitentiam agite!* meant that the whole life of the faithful should be repentance. And these words cannot refer to penance — that is, confession and satisfaction." The Latin phrase "*poenitentiam agere*" has a double meaning: it may mean "repent" and "do penance." Our Lord used the phrase in the first, the indulgence-sellers in the second sense. Since the people had been raised in the belief that the Church had the authority from God to impose church fines on them for their

trespasses, by which they were to remove the temporal punishment of their sins, this was called “doing penance,”—they were actually led to believe that they were obeying a command of Christ in buying a letter of indulgence. And not only did the people believe that they were purchasing release from temporal punishment, but from the guilt of sin and all its effects. The common man from the fields and the streets did not make the fine distinction of the hair-splitting theologians: his bargain meant to him that hell was closed and heaven open for him.

Another favorite defense of modern Catholic writers is, that the money paid for an indulgence was not meant to purchase anything, but was to be viewed as a thank-offering which the grateful hearts of the pardoned prompted them to make to the Church who had brought them the pardon free, gratis, and for nothing. This is Cardinal Gibbons’s argument. He points triumphantly to the fact that the letters of indulgence were never handed the applicants at the same desk at which the “thank-offerings” were received. He does not say which desk the applicant approached first. But, supposing he obtained the letter first and then, with a heart bounding with joy and gratitude, hurried to the other desk, we have an interesting psychological problem confronting us. The two acts, the delivery of the letter of indulgence and the surrendering of the thank-offering, we are told, are independent the one of the other. Both are free acts, the one the free forgiveness of the Church, the other the free giving of the pardoned. The Church’s grant of pardon has nothing to do with the payment of indulgence-money, and the indulgence-money is not related to the letter of indulgence. Now, then, the purchaser of an indulgence performs this remarkable feat: when he stands at the desk where the letter is handed to him, he does not think of any cost that he incurs. He views the letter as a pure gift. Then, obeying a sudden impulse of gratitude, he turns to the other desk and hands the official some money. He manages to think that he is not paying for anything, that would be utterly improper. How could a person pay for a donation, especially such a donation of spiritual and heavenly treasures? One disturbing element, however, remains: the amount of the thank-offering was fixed beforehand for particular sins, probably to regulate the recipient’s gratitude and make it adequate. The writer has resolved to test the psychology of this process on himself the next time the Boston Symphony Company comes to town. He will try and think of the great singers as true benefactors of mankind, who go about the country bestowing favors on the

public, and when he comes to the ticket-window he will merely make a thank-offering for the pleasure he is receiving. The scheme ought to work as well in this instance as in the other.

# 14. The Case of Luther's Friend Myconius

THERE IS A REMARKABLE INSTANCE recorded in the annals of the Reformation which strikingly illustrates the operations of the indulgence-vendors. This record deserves not to be forgotten. Gustav Freitag, the famous writer of German history, has embodied it in his sketch "Doktor Luther."

Frederic Mecum, in Latin Myconius, had become a monk in the Franciscan order. He had had an experience with Tetzels which caused him to turn to Luther with joy and wonder when the latter had published his Theses. Few of the writings of Myconius, who afterwards became the evangelical pastor of the city of Gotha, have been preserved. In the ducal library at Gotha Freitag found an account in Latin of the incident to which we have referred. It is as follows:

"John Tetzels, of Pirna in Meissen, a Dominican friar, was a powerful peddler of indulgences or the remission of sins by the Roman Pope. He tarried with this purpose of his for two years in the city of Annaberg, new at that time, and deceived the people so much that they all believed there was no other way of obtaining the forgiveness of sins and eternal life except to make amends with our works; concerning this making of amends, however, he said that it was impossible. But a single way was still left, that is, if we purchased the same for money from the Roman Pope, bought for ourselves, therefore, the Pope's indulgence, which he called the forgiveness of sins and a certain entrance into eternal life. Here I might tell wonders upon wonders and incredible things, what kind of sermons I heard Tetzels preach these two years in Annaberg, for I heard him preach quite diligently, and he preached every day; I could repeat his sermons to others, too, with all the gestures and intonations; not that I made him an object of ridicule, but I was entirely in earnest. For I considered everything as oracles and divine words, which one had to believe, and what came from the Pope I regarded as if coming from Christ Himself.

"Finally, at Pentecost, in the year of our Lord 1510, he threatened he would lay down the red cross and lock the door of heaven and put out the sun, and it would never again come about that the forgiveness of sins and eternal life could be obtained for so little money. Yes, he said, it was not to be expected that such charitableness of the Pope should come hither again as long as the world would stand. He also exhorted that every one should attend well to the salvation of his own soul and to that of his deceased and living friends. For now was at hand, according to him, the day of his salvation and the accepted time. And he said: 'Let no one under any condition neglect his own salvation; for if you do not have the Pope's letters, you cannot be absolved and delivered by any human being from many sins and "reserved cases"' (that is, cases with which an ordinary priest was not qualified to deal). On the doors and walls of the church printed letters were publicly posted in which it was ordered that one should henceforth not sell the letters of indulgence and the full power at the close as dear as in the beginning, in order to give the German people a sign of gratitude for their devotion; and at the end of the letter at the foot was written in addition, '*Pauperibus dentur gratis,*' to the needy the letters of indulgence are to be given for nothing, without money, for the sake of God.

"Then I began to deal with the deputies of this indulgence-peddler; but, in truth, I was impelled and urged to do so by the Holy Ghost, although I myself did not understand at the time what I was doing.

"My dear father had taught me in my childhood the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Christian Creed, and compelled me always to pray. For, he said, we had everything from God alone, gratis, for nothing, and He would also govern and lead us if we prayed with diligence. Of the indulgences and Roman remission of sins he said that they were only snares with which one tricked the simple out of their money and took it from their purses, that the forgiveness of sins and eternal life could certainly not be purchased and acquired with money. But the priests or preachers became angry and enraged when one said such things. Because I heard then nothing else in the sermons every day but the greatest praise of the remission of sins, I was filled with doubt as to whom I was to believe more, my father or the priests as teachers of the Church. I was in doubt, but still I believed the priests more than the instruction of my father. But one thing I did not grant, that the forgiveness of sins could not be acquired unless it was purchased with money, above all by the poor. On this account I was wonderfully well pleased with the little clause at the end of the Pope's letter, '*Pauperibus gratis dentur propter Deum.*'



"And as they, in three days, intended to lay down the cross with special magnificence and cut off the steps and ladders to heaven, I was impelled by my spirit to go to the commissioners and ask for the letters of the forgiveness of sins 'out of mercy for the poor.' I declared also that I was a sinner and poor and in need of the forgiveness of sins, which was granted through divine grace. On the second day, around evening, I entered Hans Pflock's house where Tetzl was assembled with the father-confessors and crowds of priests, and I addressed them in Latin and requested that they might allow me, poor man, to ask, according to the command in the Pope's letter, for the absolution of all my sins for nothing and for the sake of God, '*etiam nullo casu reservato*,' without reserving a single case, and in regard to the same they should give me the Pope's '*litteras testimoniales*,' or written testimony. Then the priests were astonished at my Latin speech, for that was a rare thing at this time, especially in the case of young boys; and they soon went out of the room into the small chamber which I was alongside, to the commissioner Tetzl. They made my desire known to him, and also asked in my behalf that he might give me the letters of indulgence for nothing. Finally, after long counsel, they returned and brought this answer:

'Dear son, we have put your petition before the commissioner with all diligence, and he confesses that he would gladly grant your request, but that he could not; and although he might wish to do so, the concession would nevertheless be naught and ineffective. For he declared unto us that it was clearly written in the Pope's letter that those would certainly share in the exceeding generous indulgences and treasures of the Church and the merits of Christ *qui porrigerent manum adjutricem*, who offered a helping hand; that is, those who would give money.' And all that they told me in German, for there was not one among them who could have spoken three Latin words correctly with any one.

"In return, however, I entreated anew, and proved from the Pope's letter which had been posted that the Holy Father, the Pope, had commanded that such letters should be given to the poor for nothing, for the sake of the Lord; and especially because there had also been written there '*ad mandatum domini Papae proprium*,' that is, at the Pope's own command.

"Then they went in again and asked the proud, haughty friar, that he might kindly grant my request and let me go from him with the letter of indulgence, since I was a clever and fluently-speaking young man and worthy of having something exceptional granted me. But they came out again and brought again the answer, \_ 'de manu auxiliatrice,' concerning the helping hand, which alone was fit for the holy indulgence. I, however, remained firm and said that they were doing me, a poor man, an injustice; the one whom both God and the Pope were unwilling to shut out of divine grace was rejected by them for some few pennies which I did not have. Then a contention arose that I should at least give something small, in order that the helping-hand might not be lacking, that I should only give a groschen; I said, 'I do not have it, I am poor.' At last it came to the point where I was to give six pfennigs; then I answered again that I did not have a single pfennig. They tried to console me and spoke with one another. Finally I heard that they were worried about two things, in the first place, that I should in no case be allowed to go without a letter of indulgence, for this might be a plan devised by others, and that some bad affair might hereafter result from it, since it was clear in the Pope's letter that it should be given to the poor for nothing. Again, however, something would nevertheless have to be taken from me in order that the others might not hear that the letters of indulgence were being given out for nothing; for the whole pack of pupils and beggars would then come running, and each one would want the same for nothing. They should not have found it necessary to be worried about that, for the poor beggars were looking more for their blessed bread to drive away their hunger.

"After they had held their deliberation, they came again to me and one gave me six pfennigs that I should give them to the commissioner. Through this contribution I, too, should become, according to them, a builder of the Church of St. Peter, at Rome, likewise a slayer of the Turk, and should furthermore share in the grace of Christ and the indulgences. But then I said frankly, impelled by the Spirit, if I wished to buy indulgences and the remission of sins for money, I could in all likelihood sell a book and buy them for my own money. I wanted them, however, for nothing, as gifts, for the sake of God, or they would have to give an account before God for having neglected and trifled away my soul's salvation on account of six pfennigs, since, as they knew, both God and the Pope wished that my soul should share in the forgiveness of all my sins for nothing, through grace. This I said, and yet, in truth, I did not know how matters stood with the letters of indulgence.

"At last, after a long conversation, the priests asked me by whom I had been sent to them, and who had instructed me to carry on such dealings with them. Then I told them the pure, simple truth, as it was, that I had not been exhorted or urged by any one at all or brought to it by any advisers, but that I had made such a request alone, without counsel of any man, only with the confidence and trust in the gracious forgiveness of sins which is given for nothing; and that I had never spoken or had dealings with such great people during all my life. For I was by nature timid, and if I had not been forced by my great thirst for God's grace, I should not have undertaken anything so great and mixed with such people and requested anything like that of them. Then the letters of indulgence were again promised me, but yet in such a way that I should buy them for six pfennigs which were to be given to me, as far as I was concerned, for nothing. I, however, continued to insist that the letters of indulgence should be given to me for nothing by him who had the power to give them; if not, I should commend and refer the matter to God. And so I was dismissed by them.

"The holy thieves, notwithstanding, became sad in consequence of these dealings; I, however, was partly downcast that I had received no letter of indulgence, partly I rejoiced, too, that there was, in spite of all, still One in heaven who was willing to forgive the penitent sinner his sins without money and loan, according to the words that I had often sung in church: 'As true as I live, says the Lord, I desire not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live.' Oh, dear Lord and God, Thou knowest that I am not lying in this matter, or inventing anything about myself.

"While doing this, I was so moved that I, on returning to my inn, almost gushed forth and melted to tears. Thus I came to my inn, went to my room, and took the cross which always lay upon the little table in my study-room, placed it upon the bench, and fell down upon the floor before it. I cannot describe it here, but at that time I was able to feel the spirit of prayer and divine grace which Thou, my Lord and God, pouredst out over me. The essential import of the same, however, was this: I asked that Thou, dear God, mightst be willing to be my Father, that Thou mightst be willing to forgive me for my sins, that I submitted myself wholly to Thee, that Thou mightst make of me now whatsoever pleased Thee, and because the priests did not wish to be gracious to me without money, that Thou mightst be willing to be my gracious God and Father.

"Then I felt that my whole heart was changed. I was disgusted with everything in this world, and it seemed to me that I had quite enough of this life. One thing only did I desire, that is, to live for God, that I might be pleasing to Him. But who was there at that time who would have taught me how I had to go about it? For the word, life, and light of mankind was buried throughout the whole world in the deepest darkness of human ordinances and of the quite foolish good works. Of Christ there was complete silence, nothing was known about Him, or, if mention was made of Him, He was represented unto us as a dreadful, fearful Judge, whom scarcely His mother and all the saints in heaven could reconcile and make merciful with bloody tears; and yet it was done in such a way that He, Christ, thrust the human being who did penance into the pains of purgatory seven years for each capital sin. It was claimed that the pain of purgatory differed from the pain of hell in nothing except that it was not to last forever. The Holy Ghost, however, now brought me the hope that God would be merciful unto me.

"And now I began to take counsel a few days with myself as to how I might take up some other vocation in life. For I saw the sin of the world and of the whole human race; I saw my manifold sin, which was very great. I had also heard something of the secret holiness and the pure, innocent life of the monks, how they served God day and night, were separated from all the wicked life of the world, and lived very sober, pious, and virtuous lives, read masses, sang psalms, fasted, and prayed at all times. I had also seen this sham life, but I did not know and understand that it was the greatest idolatry and hypocrisy.

"Thereupon I made my decision known to the preceptor, Master Andreas Staffelstein, who was the chief regent of the school; he advised me straightway to enter the Franciscan cloister, the rebuilding of which had been begun at that time. And in order that I might not become differently minded in consequence of long delay, he straightway went with me himself to the monks, praised my intellect and ability, declared in terms of praise that he had considered me the only one among his pupils of whom he was entirely confident that I should become a very devout man.

"I wished, however, first to announce my intention to my parents, too, and hear their ideas about the matter, since I was a lone son and heir of my parents. The monks, however, taught me from St. Jerome that I should drop father and mother, and not take them into consideration, and run to the cross of Christ. They quoted, too, the words of Christ, 'No one who lays hands to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' All of this was bound to impel and enjoin me to become a monk. I will not speak here of many ropes and fetters with which they bound and tied my conscience. For they said that I could never become blessed if I did not soon accept and use the grace offered by God. Thereupon I, who would rather have been willing to die than be without the grace of God and eternal life, straightway promised and engaged to come into the cloister again in three days and begin the year of probation, as they called it, in the cloister; that is, I wanted to become a pious, devout, and God-fearing monk.

"In the year of Christ 1510, the 14th of July, at two o'clock in the afternoon, I entered the cloister, accompanied by my preceptor, some few of my school-comrades, and some very devout matrons, to whom I had in part made known the reason why I was entering the spiritual order. And so I blessed my companions to the cloister, all of whom, amid tears, wished me God's grace and blessing. And thus I entered the cloister. Dear God, Thou knowest that this is all true. I did not seek idleness or provision for my stomach, nor the appearance of great holiness, but I wished to be pleasing unto Thee — Thee I wished to serve.

"Thus I at that time groped about in very great darkness" (p. 38 ff.)<sup>1</sup>

Few Christians can read this old record without pity stirring in them. The man of whom Myconius tells all this, Tetzl, has been recently represented to the American public as a theologian far superior to Luther, calm, considerate, kind, and of his actions the public has been advised that they were so utterly correct that the Roman Catholic Church of today does not hesitate one moment to do what Tetzl did. So mote it be! We admire the writer's honesty, and blush for his brazen boldness.

1. This account is published by the courtesy of the Lutheran Publication Society of Philadelphia; it is taken from their publication *Doctor Luther*, by Gustav Freitag. ↩

# 15. Luther's Faith without Works

OUT OF LUTHER'S OPPOSITION to the sale of indulgences there grew in the course of time one of the fundamental principles of Protestantism: complete, universal, and free salvation of sinners by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In the controversies which started immediately after the publication of the Ninety-five Theses, Luther was led step by step to a greater clearness in his view of sin and grace, faith and works, human reason and the divine revelation. Not yet realizing the full import of his act, Luther had in the Theses made that article of the Christian faith with which the Church either stands or falls the issue of his lifelong conflict with Rome — the article of the justification of a sinner before God. It is, therefore, convenient to review the misrepresentations which Luther has suffered from Catholic writers because of his teaching on the subject of justification at this early stage in our review, though in doing so a great many things will have to be anticipated.

Catholic writers charge Luther with having perverted the meaning of justifying faith. Luther held that justifying faith is essentially the assurance that since Christ lived on earth as a man, labored, suffered, died, and rose again in the place of sinners, the world *en masse* and every individual sinner are without guilt in the estimation of God.

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” (2 Cor. 5:19.)

To this reconciliation the sinner has contributed nothing. It has been accomplished without him. He cannot add anything to it. God only asks the sinner to believe in his salvation as finished by Jesus Christ. To believe this fact does not mean to perform a work of merit in consideration of which God is willing to bestow salvation on the believer, but it means to accept

the work of Christ as performed in our place, to rejoice therein, and to repose a sure confidence in this salvation in defiance of the accusations of our own conscience, the incriminations which the broken Law of God hurls at us, and the terrors of the final judgment. The believer regards himself as righteous before God not because of any good work that he has done, but because of the work which Christ has performed in his place. The believer holds that, when God, by raising Christ from the dead, accepted His work as a sufficient atonement for men's guilt and an adequate fulfillment of the divine Law, He accepted each and every sinner. The believer is certain that through the work of his Great Brother, Christ, he has been restored to a child relationship with God and enjoys child's privileges with his Father in heaven. The idea that he himself has done anything to bring about this blessed state of affairs is utterly foreign to this faith in Christ.

Catholic writers assert that the doctrine which we have just outlined is not Scriptural, but represents the grossest perversion of Scripture. They say this doctrine originated in "the erratic brain of Luther." Luther "was not an exact thinker, and being unable to analyze an idea into its constituents, as is necessary for one who will apprehend it correctly, he failed to grasp questions which by the general mass of the people were thoroughly and correctly understood... He allowed himself to cultivate an unnecessary antipathy to so-called 'holiness by works,' and this attitude, combined with his tendency to look at the worst side of things, and his knowledge of some real abuses then prevalent in the practice of works, doubtless contributed to develop his dislike for good works in general, and led him by degrees to strike at the very roots of the Catholic system of sacraments and grace, of penance and satisfaction, in fact, all the instruments or means instituted by God both for conferring and increasing His saving relationship with man." Luther's teaching on justification is said to be the inevitable reverse of his former self-exaltation. Abandoning the indispensable virtue of humility, he had become a prey to spiritual pride, and had entered the monastery to achieve perfect righteousness by his own works. He had disregarded the wise counsels of his brethren, who had warned him not to depend too much on his own powers, but seek the aid of God. Then failing to make himself perfect, he had run to the other extreme and declared that there was nothing good in man at all, and that man could not of himself perform any worthy action. Finally he had hit upon the idea that justification means, "not an infusion of justice into the heart of the person justified, but a mere external

imputation of it.” Faith, in Luther’s view, thus becomes an assurance that this imputation has taken place, and man accordingly need not give himself any more trouble about his salvation.

This teaching, Catholic writers contend, subverts the prominent teaching of the Scriptures that man must obey God and keep His commandments, that he must be perfect, even as his Father in heaven is perfect, that he must follow in the footsteps of Jesus who said: “I am not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it.” Furthermore, this teaching is said to dehumanize man and make out of him a stock and a stone, utterly unfit for any spiritual effort. God, they say, constituted man a rational being and imposed certain precepts on him which he was free to keep or violate as he might choose unto eternal happiness or eternal misery. The sin which all inherit from Adam has weakened the powers of man to do good, but it has not entirely abolished them. There is still something good in man by nature, and if he wants to please God and obtain His aid in his good endeavors, he must at least do as much as is still in his power to do, and believe that God for Jesus’ sake will assist him to become perfect, if not in this life, then, at any rate, in the life to come. He cannot avoid sin altogether, but he can avoid sin to a certain extent; he can at least lead an outwardly decent life. That is worth something, that is “meritorious.” He may not feel a very deep contrition over his wrong-doings, but he can feel at least an attrition, that is, a little sorrow, or he can wish that he might feel sorry. That is worth something; that is “meritorious.” He cannot love God with all his heart and all his soul, and all his strength, but he can love Him some. That is worth something; that is “meritorious.” Accordingly, when the rich young man asked the Lord what he must do to gain heaven, the Lord did not say, “Believe in Me, Accept Me for your personal Savior, Have faith in Me,” but He said: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” Paul, likewise teaches that faith and love must cooperate in man, for “faith worketh by love.” Therefore, “faith in love and love in faith justify,” but not faith alone. Faith without works is dead and cannot justify. A live faith is a faith that has works to show as its credentials that it is real faith. Hence, faith alone does not justify, but faith and works. Love is the fulfillment of the Law; faith works by love, hence, by the fulfillment of the Law. Therefore, faith alone does not justify, but faith plus the fulfillment of the Law. In endless variations Catholic writers thus seek to upset with Scripture Luther’s teaching that man is justified by faith in Christ alone, and that all



the righteousness which a sinner can present before God without fear that it will be rejected is a borrowed righteousness, not his own work-righteousness.

We might express a just surprise that Catholics should be offended at the doctrine that the righteousness of Christ is imputed, that is, reckoned or counted, to the sinner as his own. For, does not their system of indulgences rest on a theory of imputation? Do they not, by selling from the Treasure of the Church the superabundant merits of Christ and the saints to the sinner who has not a sufficient amount of them, make those merits the sinner's own by just such a process of imputation? They surely cannot infuse those merits into the sinner. But Catholics probably object to the Protestant imputation-teaching because that is too cheap and easy, and because Protestant success has spoiled a lucrative Catholic imputation-business.— This in passing. Let the Bible decide whether Luther was right in teaching justification by faith alone, by faith without works.

### **What does the Bible say about the condition of natural man after the fall?**

It says:

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” (that is, corrupt) (John 3:6).

“The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21).

“They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:3).

“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one” (Job 14:4).

"There is here no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:22, 23)..

### **What does the Bible say about the powers of natural man after the fall in reference to spiritual matters?**

It says:

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

“Ye were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

“The carnal mind,” (that is, the mind of flesh, the natural mind of man,) “is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7).

“Without Me” (Jesus is the Speaker) “ye can do nothing” John 15:5).

### **What does the Bible say about the value of man’s works of righteousness performed by his natural powers?**

It says:

“We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Is. 64:6).

“A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit” (Matt. 7:17).

### **What does the Bible say about man’s ability to fulfill the Law of God?**

It says:

“Cursed is he that confirmeth not all the words of this Law to do them” (Deut. 27:26).

“Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (Jam. 2:10).

“What the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:38).

“The Law worketh wrath,” that is, by convincing man that he has not fulfilled it and never will fulfill it, it rouses man’s anger against God who has laid this unattainable Law upon him (Rom. 4:15).

### **What does the Bible say about the relation of Christ to the Law and to sin?**

It says:

“God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, that He might redeem them that were under the Law” (Gal. 4:4).

“Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom. 10:4).

“God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteous of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law; being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

## **What does the Bible say about faith without works as a means of justification?**

It says:

“We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law” (Rom. 3:28).

“To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

“I rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the Law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the Law, blameless. [The speaker is the apostle Paul.] But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:3-9).

“If by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6). (The Catholic Bible omits the last half of this text.)

## **What does the Bible say about faith being assurance of pardon and everlasting life?**

It says:

“If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord” (Rom. 8:31-39).

“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Here we rest our case. If Luther was wrong in teaching the justification of the sinner by faith, without the deeds of the Law, then Paul was wrong, Jesus Christ was wrong, the apostles and prophets were wrong, the whole Bible is wrong. Catholics must square themselves to these texts before they dare to open their mouths against Luther. If Luther was a heretic, the Lord Jesus made him one, and He is making a heretic of every reader of the texts aforesaid. Rome will have to answer to Him.

But what about the answer of the Lord to the rich young man? What about the commandment to be perfect? Does not the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the Law, abolish the holy and good Law of God? Not at all. When Paul expounds to the Galatians the doctrine of justification by faith as compared with justification by works, he arrays the Law against the Gospel, and raises this question: “Is the Law, then, against the promises of God?” His answer reveals the whole difficulty that attends every effort to obtain righteousness by fulfilling the Law, he says: “God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily, righteousness should have been by the Law.” (Gal. 3:21.) Christ expressed the same truth when He said to the lawyer: “Do this, and thou shalt live.” (Luke 10:28.) The reason why the Law makes no person righteous is not because it is not a sufficient rule or norm of good works by which men

could earn eternal life, but because it does not furnish man any ability to achieve that righteousness which it demands. No law does that. The law only creates duties, and insists on their fulfillment under threat of punishment. It is not the function of the law to make doers of the law. Originally the Law was issued to men who were able to fulfill it, because they were created after the image of God, in perfect holiness and righteousness. That they lost this concrete ability through the fall is no reason why God should change or abrogate His Law. He purposes to help them in another way, by sending them His Son for a Redeemer, who fulfills the Law in their stead. But this wonderful plan of God for the rescue of lost man is not appreciated by any one who still believes, as the Catholics do, that he has some good powers in him left which he can develop with the help of God to such an extent that he can make himself righteous. To such a person Jesus says today as He said to the rich young man: "Keep the commandments!" That means, since you believe in your ability, proceed to employ it. Your reward is sure, provided only you do what the Law demands. But just as surely the curse of God rests on you if you do not do it. When you have become convinced that it is impossible to fulfill the Law, you may ask a different question, a question which the knowledge of your spiritual disability has wrested from you as it did from the jailer at Philippi: "What must I do to be saved?" and you will not receive the answer: "Keep the commandments!" but: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," (Acts 16:29. 30.) Not a word will be said any more about anything that you must do. You will be told: All that you ought to have done has been accomplished by One who died with the exclamation: "It is finished!" (John 19:30), and who now sends His messengers abroad inviting men to His free salvation: "Come, for all things are now ready!" (Luke 14:17.)

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good" (Is. 55:1. 2.)

When you have wearied yourself to death by your efforts to achieve righteousness, as Paul did when he was still the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus, as Luther did while he was still in the bondage of popery, when you have become hot in your confused and despairing mind against God and the Law,

which you cannot fulfill, you will appreciate the voice that calls to you as it has called to millions before you: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28.) And if you are wise, then, with the wisdom which the Spirit gives the children of God, you will not delay a minute, but come rejoicing that you need not get salvation by works, and will sing:

Just as I am, without one plea  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Rome has cursed Luther for teaching justification by faith, without the deeds of the Law. The principles which he had timidly uttered in the Theses led to bolder declarations later, when the full light of the blessed Gospel had come to him. It brought him the curse of the Pope in the bull *Exsurge, Domine!* of June 15:1520. The following estimate by a recent Catholic writer is a fair sample of the sentiments cherished by official Rome for Luther: “From out the vast number whom the enemy of man raised up to invent heresies, which, St. Cyprian says, ‘destroy faith and divide unity,’ not one, or all together, ever equaled or surpassed Martin Luther in the wide range of his errors, the ferocity with which he promulgated them, and the harm he did in leading souls away from the Church, the fountain of everlasting truth. The heresies of Sabellius, Arius, Pelagius, and other rebellious men were insignificant as compared with those Luther formulated and proclaimed four hundred years ago, and which, unfortunately, have ever since done service against the Church of the living God. In Luther most, if not all, former heresies meet, and reach their climax. To enumerate fully all the wicked, false, and perverse teachings of the arch-heretic would require a volume many times larger than the Bible, and every one of the lies and falsehoods that have been used against the Catholic Church may be traced back to him as to their original formulator.” The cause for this undisguised hatred of Luther is chiefly Luther’s teaching of justification by faith, without works. In its Sixth Session the Council of Trent condemned the following doctrines:

*On Free Will:* Canon IV:

“If any one says that the free will of man, when moved and stirred by God, cannot, by giving assent, cooperate with God, who is stirring and calling man, so that he disposes and prepares himself for obtaining the grace of justification, or that he cannot dissent if he wills, but, like some inanimate thing, does absolutely nothing and is purely passive, — let him be accursed.”

### *On Justification: Canon IX:*

“If any one says that the ungodly are justified by faith alone, in the sense that nothing else is required on their part that might cooperate to the end of obtaining the grace of justification, and that it is in no wise necessary that they be prepared and disposed (for this grace) by a movement of the will, — let him be accursed.”

### Canon XI:

“If any one says that man is justified either by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ alone or by the remission of his sins alone, without grace and love being diffused through his heart by the Holy Spirit and inhering therein, or that the grace whereby we are justified is merely the good will of God, — let him be accursed.”

### Canon XII:

“If any one says that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in the divine mercy which forgives sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this trust alone by which we are justified, — let him be accursed.”

### Canon XXIV:

“If any one says that righteousness, after having been received, is not conserved nor augmented before God by good works, but that these works are merely the fruits or signs of the justification which one has obtained, and that they are not a reason why justification is increased, — let him be accursed.”

It is a well-known characteristic of the decrees of the Council of Trent that truth and error appear skillfully interwoven in them. They are like a double motion that is offered in a deliberative body: they contain things which one must affirm, and other things which one must negative. They cannot be voted on — many of them — except after a division of the question. They contain “riders” like those in a bill that comes before a legislative body: in order to pass the bill at all, the “rider” must be passed along with the bill.

But enough crops out in these decrees to show that the Catholic Church is not willing to let the merits of Christ be regarded as the only thing that justifies the sinner. He must cooperate with the Holy Spirit to the end of being justified. He must prepare and dispose himself for receiving justifying grace, and this grace is infused into him, and manifests itself in holy movements of the heart and by good works, in acts of love. The Roman Catholic Christian is taught to believe that he is justified partly by what Christ has done, partly by what he himself is doing. He cannot subscribe to Paul's statement:

“By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8. 9.)

Nor is his justification ever complete, because his love is never perfect. It must be increased even after his death. The Roman purgatory contains sinners whom God had justified as far as He could, the sinners remaining in arrears with their, part of the contract. Accordingly, the sinner can never have the assurance that he will enter heaven. It would be presumptuous for him to think so. He must live on and work on at his poor dying rate, and hope for the best.

This teaching of the Church of Rome subverts Christianity. It strikes at the root of the faith that saves. It is a relapse into paganism and an affront offered to the Savior. It borrows the language of Scripture to express the most hideous error. By this teaching Rome does not drive men into purgatory, — which does not exist, — but into hell. It is only by a miracle of divine grace that sinners are saved where such teaching prevails: they must forget what is told them about the necessity of their own works and cling only to the Redeemer, and must thus practically repudiate the teaching of their Church. Some do this, and escape the pernicious consequences of the error of their Church. All of them will rise up in the Judgment to accuse their teachers of a heresy the worst imaginable.

Rome has, indeed, assailed “the article with which the Church either stands or falls.” All its other errors, crass, grotesque, and repulsive though they are, are mere child's play in comparison with this damning and destructive error of justification by works. Luther rightly estimated the virulence of this abysmal heresy when he said that those who attacked his teaching of justification by grace through faith alone were aiming at his



throat. Rome's teaching on justification is an attempt to strike at the vitals of Christian faith and life. It sinks the dagger into the heart of Christianity.

## 16. The Fatalist Luther

CATHOLIC WRITERS have discovered a fatalistic tendency in Luther's teaching of justification by faith without works. They declare that Luther's theory of the utter depravity of man by reason of inherited sin and his incapacity to perform any work that can be accounted good in the sight of God kills every ambition to virtuous living in man. They argue that when you tell a person that he is not capable to do good, he is apt to believe you and make no effort to perform a good deed. The situation becomes still worse when the divine predestination is introduced at this point, as has been done, they say, by Luther. If God has determined all things beforehand by a sovereign decree, if there really is no such thing as human choice, and all things occur according to a foreordained plan, man no longer has any responsibility. He is reduced to an automaton. Free will is denied him; he cannot elect by voluntary choice to engage in any God-pleasing action; for he is told that his natural reason is blinded by sin and his understanding darkened, rendering it impossible for him to discern good and evil, and leading him constantly into errors of judgment on what is right or wrong, while he is made to believe that his will is enslaved by evil lusts and passions, ever prone to wickedness and averse to godliness. As a consequence, it is claimed, man must necessarily become morally indifferent: he will not fight against sin nor follow after righteousness, because he has become convinced that it is useless for him to make any effort either in the one direction or in the other. The doctrine of man's natural depravity and the divine foreordination of all things, it is held, must drive man either to despair, insanity, and suicide, or land him hopelessly in fatalism: he will simply continue his physical life in a mechanical way, like a brute or a plant; he merely vegetates.

These fatal tendencies which are charged against Luther are refuted by no one more effectually than by Luther himself. As regards the doctrine of original sin and man's natural depravity, Luther preached that with apostolic force and precision. That doctrine is a Bible-doctrine. No person has read

his Bible aright, no expounder of Scripture has begun to explain the divine plan of salvation for sinners, if he has failed to find this teaching in the Bible. This doctrine is, indeed, extremely humiliating to the pride of man; it opens up appalling views of the misery of the human race under sin. We can understand why men would want to get away from this doctrine. But no one confers any benefit on men by minimizing the importance of the Bible-teaching, or by weakening the statements of Scripture regarding this matter. Any teaching which admits the least good quality in man by which he can prepare or dispose himself so as to induce God to view him with favor is a contradiction of the passages of Scripture which were cited in a previous chapter, and works a delusion upon men that will prove just as fatal as when a physician withholds from his patient the full knowledge of his critical condition. Yea, it is worse; for a physician who is not frank and sincere to his patient may deprive the latter of his physical life, but the teacher of God's Word who instills in men false notions of their moral and spiritual power robs them of life eternal.

Luther avoided this error. He led men to a true estimate of themselves as they are by nature. But over and against the fell power of sin he magnified the greater power of divine grace. "Where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded" (Rom. 5:20), — along this line Luther found the solution for the awful difficulty which confronts every man when he studies the Bible-doctrine of original sin, and when he discovers, moreover, that this Bible-doctrine is borne out fully by his own experience. Just for this reason, because man can do nothing to restore himself to the divine favor, God by His grace proposes to do all, and has sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to do all, and, last not least, publishes the fact that all has been done in the Gospel of the forgiveness of sin by grace through faith in Christ. Luther has taught men to confess:

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him," but he taught them also to follow up this true confession with the other: "The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

The Gospel is called in the Scriptures "the Word of Life," not only because it speaks of the life everlasting which God has prepared for His children, but also because it gives life. It approaches man, dead in trespasses and sins, and quickens him into new life. It removes from the mind of man its

natural blindness and from the will of man its innate impotency. It regenerates all the dead powers of the soul, and makes man walk in newness of life. The difficulty which original sin has created is not greater than the means and instruments which God has provided for coping with it.

“God hath concluded all in unbelief, that He might have mercy on all.” (Rom. 11:32.)

This is the only true salvation, every other is fictitious. It teaches man both to face the fearful odds against him because of his corruption, and to relish all the more the points in his favor by reason of God’s redeeming and regenerating grace. It starts its work with crushing man’s pride and self-confidence utterly, and hurling him into the abyss of despair, but it lifts him out of despair with a mighty power that breaks the power of evil in him. This change is brought about in such a gentle, tender way that the sinner has no sensation of being coerced into the new life by some farce which he cannot resist. It wins him over to God and his Christ in spite of his resistance, and makes out of his unwilling heart a willing one, which gladly coincides with the leadings of grace.

The Roman scheme of salvation might be called the ostrich method: it teaches men the foolish strategy of the bird of the desert, which hides its head in the sand when it sees an enemy approaching, and then imagines the enemy does not exist. Original sin may be disputed out of the Bible by a false interpretation, but it is not thereby ruled out of existence. When face to face with his God — if no sooner, then in the hour of death — every man feels that he is utterly corrupt and worthless, and he will curse any teacher that caused him to believe otherwise. Free will is not created by assertions. Let the apostles of free will only try, and they will find out that their freedom is nil. Catholics denounce Luther for having declared the free will of man to be nothing than a word without substance: we hear the sound when the word is pronounced, and grasp its grammatical meaning, but we do not realize it in ourselves. Every person, however, who has truly come to know himself will side with Luther, or rather with the Bible. Furthermore, to the same extent to which the Roman view exalts man’s natural powers for good, it lowers and limits the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and begets a false confidence and security that is rudely shaken when the first slip and fall occurs in the person’s Christian life. He has never really laid hold of the grace of God, because he has not been taught to trust only to the

grace of God to lead and preserve him in the way of life. He will begin to distrust the Gospel as a very inefficient instrument, and this will lead him to become indifferent to it, and finally fall away from it entirely. A real danger of apostasy and despair exists wherever the Roman dogma of man's natural free will is proclaimed.

It is, however, doing Luther a flagrant injustice when he is made to deny that man has no longer any natural reason and will in the secular affairs of this life. Luther used to divide the entire life of man into two hemispheres, the upper embracing man's relation to God, holy things, the interests of the soul here and hereafter, and the lower, embracing the purely human, temporal, and secular interests of man. It is only in the higher hemisphere that Luther denies the existence of free will. Throughout his writings Luther asserts the existence, the actual operation, and the necessity of human free will, though sadly weakened by sin, in the affairs of this present life. It will be sufficient to cite as evidence the Augsburg Confession which was drawn up with Luther's aid and submitted to Emperor Charles V in 1530 as the joint belief of Luther and his followers. "Of the Freedom of the Will," say the Protestant confessors, "they teach that man's will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness and for the choice of things subject to reason. Nevertheless, it has not power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness, since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14); but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word. These things are said in as many words by Augustine in his *Hypognosticon* (Book III):

'We grant that all men have a certain freedom of will in judging according to natural reason; not such freedom, however, whereby it is capable, without God, either to begin, much less to complete aught in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil. "Good" I call those works which spring from the good in Nature, that is, to have a will to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry, to keep cattle, to learn divers useful arts, or whatsoever good pertains to this life, none of which things are without dependence on the providence of God; yea, of Him and through Him they are and have their beginning. "Evil" I call such things as, to have a will to worship an idol, to commit murder,' etc." (Art. 18.)

Luther has always held that there is a natural intelligence and wisdom, a natural will-power and energy which men employ in their daily occupations, their trades and professions, their trade and commerce, their

literature and art, their culture and refinement, yea, that there is also a natural knowledge of God even among the Gentiles, who yet “know not God,” and a seeming performance of the things which God has commanded. But these natural abilities do not reach into the higher hemisphere; they cannot pass muster at the bar of divine justice. They do not spring from right motives, nor do they aim at right ends; they are determined by man’s self-interest. They come short of that glory which God ought to receive from worshipers in spirit and in truth (Rom. 3:23; John 4:23); they are evil in as far as they are the corrupt fruits of corrupt trees. In condemning the moral quality of these natural works of civil righteousness, Luther has said no more than Christ and His apostles have said.

Luther taught the Bible-doctrine that there is in God a hidden will which He has reserved to His majesty (Dent. 29); that His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out (Rom. 11:33); that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His will, and that the very hairs of our head are numbered (Matt. 10:29, 30); that no evil can occur anywhere without His permission (Amos 3:6; Is. 45:7). To deny these truths is to reject the Bible and to destroy the sovereign omniscience and omnipotence of God. Those who attack Luther for believing that also the evil in this world is related to God will have to change their bill of indictment: their charge is really directed against Scripture. Luther has, however, warned men not to attempt a study of this secret will of God, for the plain reason that it is secret, and it would be blasphemous presumption to try and find it out. All our dealings with God must be on the basis of His revealed will. If we only will study that, we will be fully occupied our whole life.

As regards the Scriptural doctrine of predestination, that those who ultimately attain to the life everlasting have been chosen to that end, Luther has warned men not to study this doctrine outside of Christ and the Gospel. God has told His children for their comfort amid the vicissitudes of this life that He has secured their eternal happiness against all dangers, but He has not asked them, nor does He permit them, to find out *a priori* whether this or that person is elect. Jesus Christ is the Book of Life in which the elect are to find their names recorded, and in the general way of salvation through repentance, faith, and sanctification of life they are to be led to the heritage of the saints in light. In his summary of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of Romans, Luther states that by His eternal election God has taken our salvation entirely out of our hands and placed it in His own hands.

“And this is most highly necessary. For we are so feeble and fickle that, if salvation depended upon us, not a person would be saved; the devil would overcome them all. But since God is reliable and His election cannot fail or be thwarted by any one, we still have hope over and against sin. But at this point a limit must be fixed for the presumptuous spirits who soar too high. They lead their reason first to this subject, they start at the pinnacle, they want to explore first the abyss of the divine election, and wrestle vainly with the question whether they are elect. These people bring about their own overthrow: they are either driven to despair or become reckless.—Follow the order of this Epistle: First, occupy yourself with Christ and the Gospel, in order that you may learn to know your sin and His grace; next, begin to wrestle with your sin, as chapters 1-8 teach you to do. Then, after you have reached the doctrine concerning crosses and tribulations in the eighth chapter, you will rightly learn the doctrine of election in chapters 9-11, because you will realize what a comfort this doctrine contains. For the doctrine of election can be studied without injury and secret anger against God only by those who have passed through suffering, crosses, and anguish of death. Accordingly, the old Adam in you must be dead before you can bear this subject and drink this strong wine. See that you do not drink wine while you are still a babe. There is a proper time, age, and manner for propounding the various doctrines of God to men.”

What is there fatalistic about this?

# 17. Luther a Teacher of Lawlessness

LUTHER'S TEACHING on the forgiveness of sin is sternly rebuked by Catholic writers because of its immoral tendencies. They say, when the forgiveness of sins is made as easy as Luther makes it, the people will cease being afraid if sinning.

The danger of the Gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins being misapplied has always existed in the Church. Every student of church history knows this. Catholic writers know this. Paul wrestled with this practical perversion of the loving intentions of our heavenly Father in his day. After declaring to the Romans: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," he raises the question:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" He returns this horrified answer: "God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 5:20-6:2.)

Actually there were people in the apostle's days who drew from his evangelical teaching this pernicious inference, that by sinning they gave the forgiving grace of God a larger opportunity to exert itself, hence, that they were glorifying grace by committing more sin. This meant putting a premium on sinning. For God's sake, how can you conceive a thought like that? the apostle exclaims. He repudiates the idea as blasphemous, which it is. To sin in the assurance that sin will be forgiven is not honoring, but dishonoring God and His grace; it is not exalting, but traducing faith; it is not Christian, but devilish. Summarizing the contents of Romans, chapter 5, Luther says:



“In the fifth chapter Paul comes to speak of the fruits and works of faith, such as peace, joy, love of God and all men, and in addition to these, security, boldness, cheerfulness, courage and hope amid tribulations and suffering. All these effects follow where there is genuine faith, because of the superabundant blessing which God has conferred upon us in Christ by causing Him to die for us before we could pray that He might do this, yea, while we were yet His enemies. Accordingly, we conclude that faith justifies without works of any kind, and yet it does not follow that we must not do any good works. Genuine good works cannot fail to flow from faith,— works of which the self-righteous know nothing, and in the place of which they invent their own works, in which there is neither peace, joy, security, love, hope, boldness, nor any other of the characteristics of a genuine Christian work and faith.”

In his Preface to Romans, Luther meets a somewhat different objection to faith: Christians, after they have begun to believe, still discover sin in themselves, and on account of this imagine that faith alone cannot save them. There must be something done in addition to believing to insure their salvation. In replying to this scruple, Luther has given a classical description of the quality and power of faith. This description serves to blast the Catholic charge that Luther’s easy way of justifying the sinner leads to increased sinning. Luther says:

“Faith is not the human notion and dream which some regard as faith. When they observe that no improvement of life nor any good works flow from faith even where people hear and talk much about faith, they fall into this error that they declare: faith is not sufficient, you must do works if you wish to become godly and be saved. The reason is, these people, when they hear the Gospel, hurriedly formulate by their own powers a thought in their heart which asserts: I believe. This thought they regard as genuine faith. However, as their faith is but a human figment and idea that never reaches the bottom of the heart, it is inert and effects no improvement. Genuine faith, however, is a divine work in us by which we are changed and born anew of God. (John 1:13.) It slays the old Adam, and makes us entirely new men in our heart, mind, ideas, and all our powers. It brings us the Holy Spirit. Oh, this faith is a lively, active, busy, mighty thing! It is impossible for faith not to be active without ceasing. Faith does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question has been asked, it has accomplished good works; yea, it is always engaged in doing good works. Whoever does not do such good works is void of faith; he gropes and mopes about, looking for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith nor what good works are, though he may prate and babble ever so much about faith and good works.”

There has never been a time when the Gospel and the grace of God have not been wrested to wicked purposes by insincere men, hypocrites, and bold spirits. For this reason God has instructed Christians:

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” (Matt. 7:6.)

The danger of misapplied grace is a present-day danger in every evangelical community. Earnest Christian ministers and laymen strive with this misapplication wherever they discover it. Can they do any more?

Rome will say: Why do you not do as we do in our Church? We do not preach the Gospel in such a reckless fashion, we make men work for their salvation. Rome would abolish or considerably limit the preaching of free and abundant grace to the sinner. We recoil from this suggestion because it makes the entire work of Christ of none effect, and wipes out the grandest portions of our Bible. If every abuse of something that is good must be stopped by abolishing the proper use, then let us give up eating because some make gluttons of themselves; drinking, because some are drunkards; wearing clothes, because there is much vanity in dresses; marriage, because some marriages are shamefully conducted, etc., etc.

The Roman Church does not operate on evangelical principles. Does it succeed better in cultivating true holiness among its members by its system of penances and its teaching of the meritoriousness of men's acts of piety? Catholics say to us sneeringly: It is easy to have faith; it is very convenient, when you wish to indulge, or have indulged, some passion, to remember that there is grace for forgiveness. But is any great difficulty connected with going through a penance that the priest has imposed, buying a wax candle, reciting sixteen Paternosters and ten Ave Marias, and then sitting down and saying to yourself: “Good boy! you've done it, you have squared your account again with the Almighty”? What sanctifying virtue lies in abstaining from beefsteak on Friday? Rome nowhere has improved men by her mechanical piety. What she has accomplished was made possible by the fear of purgatorial torments, by slavish dread of her mysterious powers, by ambition and bigotry. We would not exchange our abused treasures for her system of workmongery.

But the Catholic charge of tendencies to lawlessness that are said to be contained in Luther's teaching of faith without works are more serious. Luther is cited by them as declaring that one may commit innumerable sins, and they will not harm one as long as one keeps on believing in the grace of forgiveness. It is true, Luther has spoken words to this effect, and that, on quite a number of occasions. Worse than that, what Luther has said is

actually true. As a matter of fact, no sin can deprive the believer of salvation. There is only one sin that ultimately damns, final impenitence and unbelief, by which is understood the rejection of the atonement which Christ offered for the sins of the world. That atonement is actually the full satisfaction rendered to our Judge for all the sins which we have done, are doing, and will be doing till the end of our lives. For the person that dies a perfect saint, sinless and impeccable, is still to be born. The comfort that I derive from my Redeemer today will be my comfort tomorrow, that will be my only prop and stay in my dying hour. I shall need Him every hour. This is a perfectly Christian thought. St. John writes: "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin,"— mark this well: "If any man sin," though he ought not to sin,— what does the apostle say to him? He does not say: Then you are damned! or: It will require so many fasts, masses, and candles to restore you! but this is what he says:

"If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."  
(1 John 2:1. 2.)

John, then, must be included in the Catholic indictment of Luther. Luther would not have been a preacher of the genuine and full Gospel if he had not declared the impossibility of any sin or any number of sins depriving a believer of salvation.

But if the Catholics mean to say that Luther's evangelical declaration means that no believer can fall from grace by sinning, that he may sin and remain in a state of grace,— that is simply slander. Luther holds, indeed, that a person does not cease to be a Christian by every slip and fault, but he insists that no dereliction of duty, no deviation from the rule of godly living can be treated with indifference. It must be repented of, God's forgiveness must be sought, and only in this way will the Holy Spirit again be bestowed on the sinner. God may bear awhile with a Christian who has fallen into sin, but the backslider has no pleasant time with his God while he stays a backslider. This being a question of every-day, practical Christianity, Luther frequently touches this subject in his sermons, both in the Church Postil, the House Postil, and in his occasional sermons. Luther's Catholic critics could disabuse their mind about the tendencies to lawlessness in Luther's teaching if they would look up references such as these: 9, 730. 1456 f.; 11, 1790;

12, 448. 433; 13, 394; 6, 294. 1604. In one of these references (9, 1456) Luther comments on 1 John 3:6:

“Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him,” (as follows:) “‘Seeing’ and ‘knowing’ in the phraseology of John is as much as believing. ‘That every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life’ (John 6:40). ‘This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.’ Accordingly, he that sins does not believe in Him; for faith and sin cannot coexist. We may fall, but we may not cling to sin. The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of righteousness, not of sin.”

In the Smalcald Articles Luther says:

“But if certain sectarists would arise, some of whom are perhaps already present, and in the time of the insurrection of the peasants came to my view, holding that all those who have once received the Spirit or the forgiveness of sins, or have become believers, even though they would afterwards sin, would still remain in the faith, and sin would not injure them, and cry thus: ‘Do whatever you please; if you believe, it is all nothing; faith blots out all sins,’ etc. They say, besides, that if any one sins after he has received faith and the Spirit, he never truly had the Spirit and faith. I have seen and heard of many men so insane, and I fear that such a devil is still remaining in some. If, therefore, I say, such persons would hereafter also arise, it is necessary to know and teach that if saints who still have and feel original sin, and also daily repent and strive with it, fall in some way into manifest sins, as David into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, they cast out faith and the Holy Ghost. For the Holy Ghost does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand so as to be completed, but represses and restrains it so that it must not do what it wishes. But if it do what it wishes, the Holy Ghost and faith are not there present. For St. John says (1. Ep. 3:9): ‘Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, ...and he cannot sin.’ And yet that is also the truth which the same St. John says (1. Ep. 1:8): ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.’” (Part III, Art. 3, Sec. 42-45; p. 329.)

The Lutheran Church has received this statement of Luther into her confessional writings. This is the Luther of whom a modern Catholic critic says:

“This thought of the all-forgiving nature of faith so dominated his mind that it excluded the notion of contrition, penance, good works, or effort on the part of the believer, and thus his teaching destroyed root and branch the whole idea of human culpability and responsibility for the breaking of the Commandments.”

It is amazing boldness in Catholics to prefer this charge against Luther, when they themselves teach a worse doctrine than they impute to Luther. The Council of Trent in its Sixth Session, Canon 15, also in its Sixteenth

Session, Canon 15, Coster in his Enchiridion, in the chapter on Faith, p. 178, Bellarminus on Justification, chapter 15, declare it to be Catholic teaching that the believer cannot lose his faith by any, even the worst, sin he may commit. They speak of believing fornicators, believing adulterers, believing thieves, believing misers, believing drunkards, believing slanderers, etc. The very teaching which Catholics falsely ascribe to Luther is an accepted dogma of their own Church. Their charge against Luther is, at best, the trick of crying, "Hold thief!" to divert attention from themselves.

But did not Luther in the plainest terms advise his friends Weller and Melancthon to practice immoralities as a means for overcoming their despondency? Is he not reported in his Table Talk to have said that looking at a pretty woman or taking a hearty drink would dispel gloomy thoughts? that one should sin to spite the devil? Yes; and now that these matters are paraded in public, it is best that the public be given a complete account of what Luther wrote to Weller and Melancthon. There are three letters extant written to Weller during Luther's exile at Castle Coburg while the Diet of Augsburg was in progress. On June 19, 1530, Luther writes:

"Grace and peace in Christ! I have received two letters from you, my dear Jerome [this was Weller's first name], both of which truly delighted me; the second, however, was more than delightful because in that you write concerning my son Johnny, stating that you are his teacher, and that he is an active and diligent pupil. If I could, I would like to show you some favor in return; Christ will recompense you for what I am too little able to do. Magister Veit has, moreover, informed me that you are at times afflicted with the spirit of despondency. This affliction is most harmful to young people, as Scripture says: 'A broken spirit drieth the bones' (Prov. 17:22). The Holy Spirit everywhere forbids such melancholy, as, for instance, in Eccles. 11., 9: 'Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth,' and in the verse immediately following: 'Remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh.' Ecclesiasticus, likewise, says, chap. 30:22-25: 'The gladness of the heart is the life of man, and the joyfulness of a man prolongeth his days. Love thine own soul, and comfort thy heart, remove sorrow far from thee; for sorrow hath killed many, and there is no profit therein. Envy and wrath shorten the life, and carefulness bringeth age before the time. A cheerful and good heart will have a care of his meat and diet.' Moreover, Paul says 2 Cor. 7:10: 'The sorrow of the world worketh death.' Above all, therefore, you must firmly cling to this thought, that these evil and melancholy thoughts are not of God, but of the devil; for God is not a God of melancholy, but a God of comfort and gladness, as Christ Himself says: 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living' (Matt. 22:32). What else does living mean than to be glad in the Lord? Accordingly, become used to different thoughts, in order to drive away these evil thoughts, and say: The Lord has not sent you. This chiding which you experience is not of Him who has called you. In the beginning the struggle is grievous, but by practice it becomes more easy. You are not the only one who has to endure such thoughts, all the saints were afflicted by them, but they fought against them and conquered. Therefore, do not yield to these evils, but meet them bravely. The greatest task in this struggle is not to regard these thoughts, not to explore them, not to pursue the matters suggested, but despise them like the hissing of a goose and pass them by. The person that has learned to do this will conquer; whoever has not learned it will be conquered. For to muse upon these thoughts and debate with them means to stimulate them and make them stronger. Take the people of Israel as an example: they overcame the serpents, not by looking at them and wrestling with them, but by turning their eyes away from them and looking in a different direction, namely, at the brazen serpent, and they conquered. In this struggle that is the right and sure way of winning the victory. A person afflicted with such thoughts said to a certain wise man: What evil thoughts come into my mind! He received the answer: Well, let them pass out again. That remark taught the person a fine lesson. Another answered the same question thus: You cannot keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building their nests in your hair. Accordingly, you will do the correct thing when you are merry and engage in some pleasant pastime with some one, and not scruple afterwards over having done so. For God is not pleased with sadness, for which there is no reason. The sorrow over our sins is brief and at the same time is made pleasant to us by the promise of grace and the forgiveness of sins. But the other sorrow is of the devil and without promise; it is sheer worry over useless and impossible things which concern God. I shall have more to say to you when I return. Meanwhile give my greetings to your brother; I began writing to him, but the messenger who is to take this letter along is in a hurry. I shall write to him later, also to Schneidewein and others. I commend your pupil to you. May the Spirit of Christ comfort and gladden your heart! Amen.' (21a, 1487 ff.)

The second letter to Weller was presumably written some time in July. It reads as follows:

“Grace and peace in Christ. My dearest Jerome, you must firmly believe that your affliction is of the devil, and that you are plagued in this manner because you believe in Christ. For you see that the most wrathful enemies of the Gospel, as, for instance, Eck, Zwingli, and others, are suffered to be at ease and happy. All of us who are Christians must have the devil for our adversary and enemy, as Peter says: ‘Your adversary, the devil, goeth about,’ etc., 1 Pet. 5:8. Dearest Jerome, you must rejoice over these onslaughts of the devil, because they are a sure sign that you have a gracious and merciful God. You will say: This affliction is more grievous than I can bear; you fear that you will be overcome and vanquished, so that you are driven to blasphemy and despair. I know these tricks of Satan: if he cannot overcome the person whom he afflicts at the first onset, he seeks to exhaust and weaken him by incessantly attacking him, in order that the person may succumb and acknowledge himself beaten. Accordingly, whenever this affliction befalls you, beware lest you enter into an argument with the devil, or muse upon these death-dealing thoughts. For this means nothing else than to yield to the devil and succumb to him. You must rather take pains to treat these thoughts which the devil instills in you with the severest contempt. In afflictions and conflicts of this kind contempt is the best and easiest way for overcoming the devil. Make up your mind to laugh at your adversary, and find some one whom you can engage in a conversation. You must by all means avoid being alone, for then the devil will make his strongest effort to catch you; he lies in wait for you when you are alone. In a case like this the devil is overcome by scorning and despising him, not by opposing him and arguing with him. My dear Jerome, you must engage in merry talk and games with my wife and the rest, so as to defeat these devilish thoughts, and you must be intent on being cheerful. This affliction is more necessary to you than food and drink. I shall relate to you what happened to me when I was about your age. When I entered the cloister, it happened that at first I always walked about sad and melancholy, and could not shake off my sadness. Accordingly, I sought counsel and confessed to Dr. Staupitz, – I am glad to mention this man’s name. I opened my heart to him, telling him with what horrid and terrible thoughts I was being visited. He said in reply: Martin, you do not know how useful and necessary this affliction is to you; for God does not exercise you thus without a purpose. You will see that He will employ you as His servant to accomplish great things by you. This came true. For I became a great doctor — I may justly say this of myself —; but at the time when I was suffering these afflictions I would never have believed that this could come to pass. No doubt, that is what is going to happen to you: you will become a great man. In the mean time be careful to keep a brave and stout heart, and impress on your mind this thought that such remarks which fall from the lips chiefly of learned and great men contain a prediction and prophecy. I remember well how a certain party whom I was comforting for the loss of his son said to me: Martin, you will see, you will become a great man. I often remembered this remark, for, as I said, such remarks contain a prediction and a prophecy. Therefore, be cheerful and brave, and cast these exceedingly terrifying thoughts entirely from you. Whenever the devil worries you with these thoughts, seek the company of men at once, or drink somewhat more liberally, jest and play some jolly prank, or do anything exhilarating. Occasionally a person must drink somewhat more liberally, engage in plays, and jests, or even commit some little sin from hatred and contempt of the devil, so as to leave him no room for raising scruples in our conscience about the most trifling matters. For when we are overanxious and careful for fear that we may be doing wrong in any matter, we shall be conquered. Accordingly, if the devil should say to you: By all means, do not drink! you must tell him: Just because you forbid it, I shall drink, and that, liberally. In this manner you must always do the contrary of what Satan forbids. When I drink my wine unmixed, prattle with the greatest unconcern, eat more frequently, do you think that I have any other reason for doing these things than to scorn and spite the devil who has attempted to spite



and scorn me? Would God I could commit some real brave sin to ridicule the devil, that he might see that I acknowledge no sin and am not conscious of having committed any. We must put the whole law entirely out of our eyes and hearts,— we, I say, whom the devil thus assails and torments. Whenever the devil charges us with our sins and pronounces us guilty of death and hell, we ought to say to him: I admit that I deserve death and hell; what, then, will happen to me? Why, you will be eternally damned! By no means; for I know One who has suffered and made satisfaction for me. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where He abides, there will I also abide.” (21a, 1532 ff.)

The third letter to Weller is dated August 15th. It reads as follows:

“Grace and peace in Christ. I have forgotten, my dear Jerome, what I wrote you in my former letter concerning the spirit of melancholy, and I may now be writing you the same things and harping on the same string. Nevertheless, I shall repeat what I said, because we all share each other’s afflictions, and as I am suffering in your behalf, so you, no doubt, are suffering in mine. It is one and the same adversary that hates and persecutes every individual brother of Christ. Moreover, we are one body, and in this body one member suffers for every other member, and that, for the sole reason that we worship Christ. Thus it happens that one is forced to bear the other’s burden. See, then, that you learn to despise your adversary. For you have not sufficiently learned to understand this spirit, who is an enemy to spiritual gladness. You may rest assured that you are not the only one who bears this cross and are not suffering alone. We are all bearing it with you and are suffering with you. God, who commanded: ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ certainly declares by this commandment that He is opposed to these melancholy and death-bringing thoughts, and that He, on the contrary, would have us cherish lively and exceedingly cheerful thoughts. So the Psalmist declares, saying: ‘In His favor is life,’ Ps. 30:5 [Luther understands this to mean: He favors life] and in Ezekiel God says: ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live’ (chap. 33:11). On the other hand, etc. Now, then, since it is certain that such melancholy is displeasing to God, we have this reliable comfort that if this demon cannot be entirely removed from us, divine strength will be supplied to us, so that we may not feel the affliction so much. I know that it is not in our power to remove these thoughts at our option, but I also know that they shall not gain the upper hand; for we are told: ‘He shall not suffer the righteous to be moved,’ if we only learn to cast our burden upon Him. The Lord Jesus, the mighty Warrior and unconquerable Victor, will be your aid. Amen.” (21a, 1543 f.)

These three letters constitute the whole evidence for the Catholic charge against Luther that he offered advice to Weller that is immoral and demoralizing. The indictment culminates in these three distinct points: Luther advises Weller 1. to drink freely and be frivolous; 2. to commit sin to spite the devil; 3. to have no regard for the Ten Commandments. Since we shall take up the last point in a separate chapter, we limit our remarks to the first two points.

When Luther advises Weller to drink somewhat more liberally, that does not mean that Luther advises Weller to get drunk. This, however, is exactly

what Luther is made to say by his Catholic critics. They make no effort to understand the situation as it confronted Luther, but pounce upon a remark that can easily be understood to convey an offensive meaning. Neither does what Luther says about his own drinking mean that he ever got drunk. We have spoken of this matter in a previous chapter, and do not wish to repeat. Luther's remarks about jesting, merry plays, and jolly pranks in which he would have Weller engage are likewise vitiated by the Catholic insinuation that he advises indecent frivolities, yea, immoralities. Why, all the merriment which he urges upon Weller is to take place in Luther's home and family circle, in the presence of Luther's wife and children, in the presence of Weller's little pupil Hans, who at that time was about four years old. The friends of the family members of the Faculty at the University, ministers, students who either stayed at Luther's home, like Weller, or frequently visited there, are also included in this circle whose company Weller is urged to seek. Imagine a young man coming into this circle drunk, or half drunk, and disporting himself hilariously before the company! We believe that not even all Catholics can be made to believe the insinuations of their writers against Luther when all the facts in the case are presented to them.

Let us, moreover, remind ourselves once more that, to measure the social proprieties of the sixteenth century by modern standards, is unfair. A degree of culture in regard to manners and speech can be reached by very refined people that grows away from naturalness. The old Latin saying: *Naturalia non sunt turpia* (We need not feel ashamed of our natural acts), will never lose its force. There are expressions in Luther's writings — and in the Bible — that nowadays are considered unchaste, but are in themselves chaste and pure. Even the extremest naturalness that speaks with brutal frankness about certain matters is a better criterion of moral purity than the supersensitive prudishness that squirms and blushes, or pretends to blush, at the remotest reference to such matters. It all depends on the thoughts which the heart connects with the words which the mouth utters. This applies also to the manner in which former centuries have spoken about drinking. We sometimes begin to move uneasily, as if something Pecksniffian had come into our presence, when we behold the twentieth century sitting in judgment on the manners and morals of the sixteenth century.

In Luther's remarks about sinning to spite the devil we have always heard an echo from his life at the cloister. One's judgment about the

monastic life is somewhat mitigated when one hears how Dr. Staupitz and the brethren in the convent at Erfurt would occasionally speak to Luther about the latter's sins. Staupitz called them "*Puppensuenden*." It is not easy to render this term by a short and apt English term; "peccadillo" would come near the meaning. A child playing with a doll will treat it as if it were a human being, will dress it, talk to it, and pretend to receive answers from it, etc. That is the way, good Catholics were telling Luther, he was treating his sins. His sins were no real sins, or he had magnified their sinfulness out of all proportion. This same advice Luther hands on to another who was becoming a hypochondriac as he had been. When the mind is in a morbid state it imagines faults, errors, sins, where there are none. The melancholy person in his self-scrutiny becomes an intolerant tyrant to himself. He will flay his poor soul for trifles as if they were the blackest crimes: In such moments the devil is very busy about the victim of gloom and despair. Luther has diagnosed the case of Weller with the skill of a nervous specialist. He counsels Weller not to judge himself according to the devil's prompting, and, in order to break Satan's thrall over him, to wrench himself free from his false notions of what is sinful. In offering this advice, Luther uses such expressions as: "Sin, commit sin," but the whole context shows that he advises Weller to do that which is in itself not sinful, but looks like sin to Weller in his present condition. When Luther declares he would like to commit a real brave sin himself as a taunt to the devil, he adds: "Would that I could!" That means, that, as a matter of fact, he could not do it and did not do it, because it was wrong. What bold immoral act did Weller commit in consequence of Luther's advice? What immoralities are there in Luther's own life? Luther's letters did not convey the meaning to his morbid young friend that Catholic writers think and claim they did.

Luther's advice to Melanchthon which is so revolting to Catholics that they have made it the slogan in their campaign against Luther refers to a state of affairs that is identical with what we noted in our review of the correspondence with Weller. It is contained in a letter which Luther wrote August 1, 1521, while he was an exile in the Wartburg. He says to his despondent friend and colleague at the University of Wittenberg:

“If you are a preacher of grace, do not preach a fictitious, but the true grace. If grace is of the true sort, you will also have to bear true, not fictitious, sins. God does not save those who only acknowledge themselves sinners in a feigned manner. Be a sinner, then, and sin bravely, but believe more bravely still and rejoice in Christ, who is the Victor over sin, death, and the world. We must sin as long as we are in this world; the present life is not an abode of righteousness; however, we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, says Peter (2. Ep. 3:13). We are satisfied, by the richness of God’s glory, to have come to the knowledge of the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world. No sin shall wrest us from Him, were we even in one day to commit fornication and manslaughter a thousand times. Do you think the price paltry and the payment small that has been made for us by this great Lamb?” (15, 2589.)

“Be a sinner, and sin bravely, but believe more bravely still” – this is the *chef d’oeuvre* of the muckrakers in Luther’s life. The reader has the entire passage which contains the outrageous statement of Luther before him, and will be able to judge the connection in which the words occur. What caused Luther to write those words? Did Melanchthon contemplate some crime which he was too timid to perpetrate? According to the horrified expressions of Catholics that must have been the situation. Luther, in their view, says to Melanchthon: Philip, you are a simpleton. Why scruple about a sin? You are still confined in the trammels of very narrow-minded moral views. You must get rid of them. Have the courage to be wicked, Make a hero of yourself by executing some bold piece of iniquity. Be an “*Übermensch*.” Sin with brazen unconcern; be a fornicator, a murderer, a liar, a thief, defy every moral statute, – only do not forget to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. His grace is intended, not for hesitating, craven sinners, but for audacious, spirited, high-minded criminals.

This, we are asked to believe, is the sentiment of the same Luther who in his correspondence with Weller declares that he could not if he would commit a brave sin to spite the devil. Can the reader induce himself to believe that Luther advised Melanchthon to do what he himself knew was a moral impossibility to himself because of his relation to God? And again we put the question which we put in connection with the Weller letters: What brave sin did Melanchthon actually commit upon being thus advised by Luther?

One glance at the context, a calm reflection upon the tenor of this entire passage in the letter to Melanchthon, suffices to convince every unbiased reader that Luther is concerned about Melanchthon as he was about Weller: he fears his young colleague is becoming a prey to morbid self-incrimination. It is again a case of “*Puppensuenden*” being expanded till

they seem ethical monstrosities. But, as the opening words of the paragraph show, Luther had another purpose in writing to Melanchthon as he did. Melanchthon was a public preacher and expounder of the doctrine of evangelical grace. He must not preach that doctrine mincingly, haltingly. Is that possible? Indeed, it is. Just as there are preachers afraid to preach the divine Law and to tell men that they are under the curse of God and merit damnation, so there are preachers afraid, actually afraid, to preach the full Gospel, without any limiting clauses and provisos. Just as there are teachers of Christianity who promptly put on the soft pedal when they reach the critical point in their public deliverances where they must reprove sin, and who hate intensive preaching of the Ten Commandments, so there are evangelical teachers who dole out Gospel grace in dribbles and homeopathic doses, as if it were the most virulent poison, of which the sinner must not be given too much. Luther tells Melanchthon: If you are afraid to draw every stop in the organ when you play the tune of Love Divine, All Love Excelling, you had better quit the organ. There are some sinners in this world that will not understand your faint evangelical whispers; they need to have the truth that Christ forgives their sins, all their sins,— their worst sins, blown into them with all the trumpets that made the walls of Jericho fall. If Melanchthon did not require a strong faith in the forgiving grace of God for himself, he needed it as a teacher of that grace to others; he must, therefore, familiarize himself with the immensity and power of that grace.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the Catholic writers who express their extreme disgust at the immoral principles of Luther belong to a Church whose theologians have made very questionable distinctions between venial sins and others. Papal dispensations and decisions of Catholic casuists, especially in the order of the Jesuits, have startled the world by their moral perverseness. Yea, the very principles of probabilism and mental reservation which the Jesuits have espoused are anti-ethical. In accordance with the principle last named, “when important interests are at stake, a negative or modifying clause may remain unuttered which would completely reverse the statement actually made. This principle justified unlimited lying when one’s interest or convenience seemed to require it. Where the same word or phrase has more than one sense, it may be employed in an unusual sense with the expectation that it will be understood in the usual. [This is called "amphibology" by them.] Such

evasions may be used under oath in a civil court. Equally destructive of good morals was the teaching of many Jesuit casuists that moral obligation may be evaded by directing the intention when committing an immoral act to an end worthy in itself; as in murder, to the vindication of one's honor; in theft, to the supplying of one's needs or those of the poor; in fornication or adultery, to the maintenance of one's health or comfort. Nothing did more to bring upon the society the fear and distrust of the nations and of individuals than the justification and recommendation by several of their writers of the assassination of tyrants, the term 'tyrant' being made to include all persons in authority who oppose the work of the papal church or order. The question has been much discussed, Jesuits always taking the negative side, whether the Jesuits have taught that 'the end justifies the means.' It may not be possible to find this maxim in these precise words in Jesuit writings; but that they have always taught that for the 'greater glory of God,' identified by them with the extension of Roman Catholic (Jesuit) influence, the principles of ordinary morality may be set aside, seems certain. The doctrine of philosophical sin, in accordance with which actual attention to the sinfulness of an act when it is being committed is requisite to its sinfulness for the person committing it, was widely advocated by members of the society. The repudiation of some of the most scandalous maxims of Jesuit writers by later writers, or the placing of books containing scandalous maxims on the Index, does not relieve the society or the Roman Catholic Church from responsibility, as such books must have received authoritative approval before publication, and the censuring of them does not necessarily involve an adverse attitude toward the teaching itself, but may be a more measure of expediency." (A. H. Newman, in *New Schaff-Herzog Encycl.*, 6:146.)

## 18. Luther, Repudiates the Ten Commandments?

IN LUTHER'S CORRESPONDENCE with Weller there occurs a remark to the effect that Weller must put the Decalog out of his mind. Similar statements occur in great number throughout Luther's writings. In some of these statements Luther speaks in terms of deep scorn and contempt of the Law, and considers it the greatest affront that can be offered Christians to place them under the Law of Moses. He declares that Moses must be regarded by Christians as if he were a heretic, excommunicated by the Church, and assigns him to the gallows. Some of the strongest invectives of this kind are found in his exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians. These stern utterances of Luther against the Law serve the Catholics as the basis for their charge that Luther is the most destructive spirit that has arisen within the Church. He is said to have destroyed the only perfect norm of right and wrong by his violent onslaughts on Moses. Once the commandments of God are abrogated, the feeling of duty and responsibility, they argue, is plucked from the hearts of men, and license and vice rush in upon the world with the force of a springtide.

The reader will remember what has been said in a previous chapter about Luther's labors to expound and apply the divine Law, also about the intimate and loving relation which he maintained to the Ten Commandments to the end of his life. Luther has spoken of Moses as a teacher of true holiness in terms of unbounded admiration and praise. He declares the writings of Moses the principal part of our Bible, because all the prophets and apostles have drawn their teaching from Moses and have expanded the teaching of Moses. Christ Himself has appealed to Moses as an authority in matters of religion. The greatest distinction of Moses in Luther's view is that he has prophesied concerning Christ, and by revealing the people's sin through the teaching of the Law has made them see and feel the necessity of a redemption through the Mediator. However, also the laws

of Moses are exceedingly fine, Luther thinks. The Ten Commandments are essentially the natural moral law implanted in the hearts of man. But also his forensic laws, his civil statutes, his ecclesiastical ordinances, his regulations regarding the hygiene, and the public order that must be maintained in a great commonwealth, are wise and salutary. The Catholics are forced to admit that alongside of the open contempt which Luther occasionally voices for Moses and the Mosaic righteousness inculcated by the Law there runs a cordial esteem of the great prophet. Luther regards the Law of Moses as divine; it is to him just as much the Word of God as any other portion of the Scriptures. To save their faces in a debate they must concede this point, but they charge Luther with being a most disorderly reasoner, driven about in his public utterances by momentary impulses: He will set up a rule today which he knocks down tomorrow. He will cite the same Principle for or against a matter. He is so erratic that he can be adduced as authority by both sides to a controversy. The Catholic may succeed with certain people in getting rid of Luther on the claim that his is a confused mind, and that in weighty affairs he adopts the policy of the opportunist. Most men will demand a better explanation of the seeming self-contradiction in Luther's attitude toward the divine Law.

There is only one connection in which Luther speaks disparagingly of the Law, and we shall show that what he says is no real disparagement, but the correct Scriptural valuation of the Law. Luther holds that the Ten Commandments do not save any person nor contribute the least part to his salvation. They must be entirely left out of account when such questions are to be answered as these: How do I obtain a gracious God? How is my sin to be forgiven? How do I obtain a good conscience? How can I come to I live righteously? How can I hope to die calmly, in the confidence that I am going to heaven? On such occasions Luther says: Turn your eyes away from Moses and his Law; he cannot help you; you apply at the wrong office when you come to him for rest for your soul here and hereafter. He gives you no comfort, and he cannot, because it is not his function to do so. It is Another's business to do that. Him you grossly dishonor and traduce when you refuse to come to Him for what He alone can give, and when you go to some one who does not give you what you need, though you pretend that you get it from this other. A proper relation to God is established for us only by Jesus Christ. He is the exclusive Mediator appointed by God for His dealing with man and for man in his dealings with God. There is salvation



in none other; nor can our hope of heaven be placed on any other foundation than that which God laid when He appointed Christ our Redeemer (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 3:11).

This is Bible-doctrine. “The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” says John (chap. 1:17). Here the two fundamental teachings of the Scriptures are strictly set apart the one from the other. They have much in common: they have the same holy Author, God; their contents are holy; they serve holy ends. But they are differently related to sinful man: the Law tells man what he must do, the Gospel, what Christ has done for him; the Law issues demands, the Gospel, gratuitous offers; the Law holds out rewards for merits or severe penalties, the Gospel, free and unconditioned gifts; the Law terrifies, the Gospel cheers the sinner; the Law turns the sinner against God by proving to him his incapacity to practice it, the Gospel draws the sinner to God and makes him a willing servant of God.

Paul demands of the Christian minister that he “rightly divide the Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). To preach the Bible-doctrine of salvation aright and with salutary effect, the Law and the Gospel must be kept apart as far as East is from the West. The Law is truth, but, it is not the truth that saves, because it knows of no grace for the breakers of the Law. The Gospel teaches holiness and righteousness, however, not such as the sinner achieves by his own effort, but such as has been achieved for the sinner by his Substitute, Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not for men who imagine that they can do the commandments of God; Jesus Christ says: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). On the other hand, the Law is not for sinners who know themselves saved. “The Law is not made for a righteous man” (1 Tim. 1:9). Christians employ the Law for the regulation of their lives, as a pattern and index of holy works which are pleasing to God and as a deterrent from evil works, but they do not seek their salvation, neither wholly nor in part, in the Law, nor do they look to the Law for strength to do the will of God. Moreover Christians, while they are still in the flesh, apply the Law to the old Adam in themselves; they bruise the flesh with its deceitful lusts with the scourge of Moses, and thus they are in a sense under the Law, and can never be without the Law while they live. But in another sense they are not under the Law: all their life is determined by divine grace; their faith, their hope, their charity, is entirely

from the Gospel, and the new man in them acknowledges no master except Jesus Christ, who is all in all to them (Eph. 1:23).

When Luther directed men for their salvation away from the Law, he did what Christ Himself had done when He called to the multitudes: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The people to whom these words were addressed had the Law of Moses and wearied themselves with its fulfillment, such as it was under the direction of teachers and guides who had misinterpreted and were misapplying that Law continually. Even in that false view of the Law which they had been taught, and which did not at all exhaust its meaning, there was no ease of conscience, no assurance of divine favor, no rest for their souls. Christ with His gracious summons told them, in effect: You must forget the Law and the ordinances of your elders and your miserable works of legal service. You must turn your back upon Moses. In Me, only in Me, is your help.

Moses himself never conceived his mission to be what the Catholics declare it to be by their doctrine of salvation by faith plus works. Moses directed his people to the greater Prophet who was to come in the future, and told them: “Unto Him shall ye hearken” (Deut. 18:15). Jesus was pointed out to the world as that Prophet of whom Moses had spoken, when the Father at the baptism and the transfiguration of Christ repeated from heaven the warning cry of Israel’s greatest teacher under the old dispensation (Matt. 3:17; 17:5).

But was it necessary, in speaking of the inability of the Law to save men, to use such strong and contemptuous terms as Luther has used? Yes. The Catholics do not seem to know in what strong terms the Bible has rejected the Law as a means of salvation. Paul denounces the Galatians again and again as “foolish,” “bewitched,” and bastards of a bondwoman, because they think they will be saved by their works done according to the Law (chap. 3:1, 3; 4:21 ff.). He calls them godless infidels, slaves, silly children still in their nonage, because they imagine that they become acceptable to God by their own righteousness (chap. 4:9; 3:23 ff.). Yea, he reprobates their legal service when he says: “As many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse” (chap. 3:10). How contemptuous does it not sound to hear him call the legal ordinances which the Galatians were observing “beggarly elements” (chap. 4:9), and the law a “schoolmaster” (chap. 3:24), that is, a tutor fit only for little abecedarians who cannot be treated as full-

grown persons that are able to make a right use of their privileges as children and heirs of God. Why do not the Catholics turn up their nose at Paul, as they do at Luther, when Paul calls all his legal righteousness “dung” (Phil. 2:8), or when he speaks slightly of the observance on which the Colossians prided themselves as “rudiments of the world” (Col. 2:20)? Why does he call the Law “the handwriting of ordinances that has been blotted out” (Col. 2:14) but to declare to the Colossians that they are to fear the Law as little as a debtor fears a canceled note that had been drawn against him? What was it that Paul rebuked Peter for when he told him that he was building again the things which they both had destroyed (Gal. 2:18)? Mark you, he says, “destroyed.” Why, it was this very thing for which Luther is faulted by Rome, the Law as an instrument for obtaining righteousness before God. Could a person renounce the Law in more determined, one might almost say, ruthless fashion, than by saying: “I am dead to the Law, that I might live unto God”? Paul is the person who thus speaks of the Law (Gal. 2:19). The Catholics have again taken hold of the wrong man when they assail Luther for repudiating the Law of God; they must start higher up; they will find the real culprit whom they are trying to prosecute among the holy apostles. Yea, even the apostles will decline the honor of being the original criminals, they will pass the charges preferred against them higher up still; for what contemptuous terms were used by them in speaking of the Law were inspired terms which they received from God the Holy Ghost. That contempt for the Law which Luther voices under very particular circumstances Luther has learned from his Bible and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

That contempt is a mark of every evangelical preacher today. If ministers of the Gospel today do not denounce the Law when falsely applied, they betray a sacred trust and become traitors to Christ and the Church. For every one who teaches men to seek their salvation in any manner and to any degree in their own works serves not Christ, but Antichrist. This is such a fearful calamity that no terms should be regarded as too scathing in which to rebuke legalistic tendencies. These tendencies are the bane and blight of Christianity; if they are not rooted out, Christianity will perish from off the face of the earth. Workmongers are missionaries of the father of lies and the murderer from the beginning: so far as in them lies, they slay the souls of men by their false teaching of the Law.

However, Luther reveals another attitude toward the Law. At three distinct times in his public career he had to do with people who had assumed a hostile attitude to the Law of God. If the contention of Luther's Catholic critics were true, Luther ought to have hailed these occasions with delight and made common cause with the repudiators of the Law. While he was at the Wartburg, a disturbance broke out at Wittenberg. Under the leadership of Carlstadt, a professor at the University, men broke into the churches and smashed images. Church ordinances of age-long standing were to be abrogated, the cloisters were to be thrown open, and a new order of things was to be inaugurated by violence. Against the will of the Elector of Saxony, who had afforded Luther an asylum in his castle, Luther, at the risk of his life, came out of his seclusion, boldly went to Wittenberg, and preached a series of sermons by which he quelled the riotous uprising. Even before his return to Wittenberg he had published a treatise in which he warned Christians to avoid tumult and violent proceedings. The eight sermons which he preached to the excited people of Wittenberg are an invaluable evidence that Luther meant to proceed in the way of order. The mass and the confessional would have been abolished at that time, had it not been for Luther's interference. He made some lifelong enemies by insisting that the reformatory movement must be conservative. He held that before men's consciences had been liberated by the teaching of Christ, they were not qualified for exercising true Christian liberty, and their violent proceedings were nothing but carnal license. Everybody knows how deeply Luther himself was interested in the abolition of the idolatrous Mass and the spiritual peonage which Rome had created for men by means of the confessional. Only a person who puts principles above policies could have acted as Luther did in those turbulent days. He wanted for his followers, not wanton rebels and frenzied enthusiasts, but men who respect the Word of God, discreet and gentle men whose weapons of warfare were not carnal. A man who is so cautious as not to approve the putting down of acknowledged evils because he is convinced that the attempt is premature and exceeds the limits of propriety, will not lend his hand to abolishing the divine norm of right, the holy commandments of God.

The second occasion on which Luther in a most impressive manner showed his profound regard for the maintenance of human and divine laws was during the bloody uprising of the peasants. While thoroughly in sympathy with the rebellious peasants in their righteous grievances against

their secular and spiritual oppressors, the barons and the bishops, and pleading the peasants' cause in its just demands before their lords, he unflinchingly rebuked their extreme demands and their still extremer actions. If by his preaching of the Gospel Luther had been the instigator of the peasants' uprising, what a brazen hypocrite he must have been in denouncing acts which he must have acknowledged to be fruits of his teaching! Among the noblemen of Germany Luther counted not a few frank admirers and staunch supporters of his reformatory work. Their influence was of the highest value to him in those critical days when his own life was not safe. Yet he rebuked the sins of the high and mighty, their avarice and insolence, which had brought on this terrible disturbance. In his writings dealing with this sad conflict Luther impresses one like one of the ancient prophets who stand like a rock amid the raging billows of popular passions and with even-handed justice deliver the oracles of God to high and low, calling upon all to bow before the supreme will of the righteous Lawgiver. Would the great lords of the land have meekly taken Luther's rebuke if they had been able to charge Luther with being an accessory to the peasants' crimes?

The third occasion on which Luther's innocence of the charges of Romanists that he was an instigator of lawlessness was most effectually vindicated was the Antinomian controversy. This episode, more than any other, embittered the life of the aging Reformer. The Antinomians drew from the evangelical teachings those disastrous consequences which the Catholics impute to Luther: they claimed that the Law is not in any way applicable to Christians. They insisted that the Ten Commandments must not be preached to Christians at all. Christians, they claimed, determine in the exercise of their sovereign liberty what they may or may not do. Being under grace, they are superior to the Law and a law unto themselves. At first Luther had been inclined to treat this error mildly, because it seemed incredible to him that enlightened children of God could so fatally misread the teaching of God's Word. He thought the Antinomians were either misunderstood by people who had no conception of the Gospel and of evangelical liberty, or they were grossly slandered by persons ill-disposed to them because of their successful preaching of the Gospel. When their error had been established beyond a doubt, he did not hesitate a moment to attack it. In sermons and public disputations, before the common people of Wittenberg and the learned doctors and the students of the University, he

defended the holy Law of God as the norm of right conduct and the mirror showing up the sinfulness of man also for Christians, and he insisted that those who had fallen into this error must publicly recant. It was due to Luther's unrelenting opposition that Agricola, one of the leaders of the Antinomians and at one time a dear friend of Luther, withdrew his false teaching and offered apologies in a published discourse. To his guests Luther in those days remarked at the table:

"Satan, like a furious harlot, rages in the Antinomians, as Melancthon writes from Frankfort. The devil will do much harm through them and cause infinite and vexatious evils. If they carry their lawless principles into the State as well as the Church, the magistrate will say: I am a Christian, therefore the law does not pertain to me. Even a Christian hangman would repudiate the law. If they teach only free grace, infinite license will follow, and all discipline will be at an end." (Preserved Smith, p. 283.)

Luther held that forbidding the preaching of the Law meant to prohibit preaching God's truth (20:1635), and to abrogate the Law he regarded as tantamount to abrogating the Gospel (22, 1029).

Far from repudiating the Ten Commandments, then, Luther, by insisting on a distinction between Law and Gospel, and assigning to each a separate sphere of operation in the lives of Christians, has done more than any other teacher in the Church since the days of Paul to impress men with a sincere respect of the Law, and to honor it by obedience to its precepts.

# 19. Luther's Invisible Church

IN HIS THESES against the sale of indulgences, especially in the first two, Luther had uttered a thought which led to a new conception of the Church. He had declared that Christian life does not consist in the performance of certain works of piety, such as going to confession, performing the penances imposed by priests, hearing Mass, etc.,— all of which are external, visible acts,— but in a continuous penitential relation of the heart to God. The Christian, conscious of his innate corruption and his daily sinning, faces God at all times in the attitude of a humble suitor for mercy. The posture of the publican is the typical attitude of the Christian. He recognizes no merit in himself, he pleads no worthiness which would give him a just claim upon God's favor. His single hope and sole reliance is in the merit and atoning work of his Savior Jesus Christ. The Christian's penitence embraces as a constituent element faith in the forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake. In the strength of his faith the Christian begins to wrestle with the sin which is still indwelling in him and which besets him from without. The agony of the Redeemer which he places before his eyes at all times proves a deterrent from sin, and the holy example of Jesus, who ran with rejoicing the way of the commandments of God, becomes an inspiring example to him: actuated by gratitude for the love of the Son of God who gave Himself for him and reclaimed him from certain perdition, he begins to reproduce the life of Jesus in his own conversation. His whole life is determined by his relation to Jesus: his thoughts, affections, words, and deeds are a reflex of the life of his Lord. For him to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21). All his acts become expressions of his faith. He says with Paul: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

During the discussions which followed the publication of the Theses, especially during the Leipzig Debate with Eck in 1519, this thought of Luther was expanded, and applied to the idea of the Church. Christianity, in

Luther's teaching, came to be set forth as something vastly different from the external and mechanical religiousness which had been accepted as Christianity by Rome. Christianity meant a new life, swayed by new motives, governed by new principles. It was seen to be entirely inward, an affair of the heart and soul and mind, and, ulteriorly, an affair of the body and the natural life. The religion of Rome, with its constant emphasis on works of men's piety and the merit resulting therefrom, had become thoroughgoing externalism. So many prayers recited, so many altars visited, so many offerings made, meant so many merits achieved. The scheme worked out with mathematical precision. Devout Catholics might well keep a ledger of their devotional acts, as Gustav Freitag in his *Ancestors* represents Marcus Koenig as having done.

In the Catholic view the Church is a visible society, an ecclesiastical organization with a supreme officer at the head, and a host of subordinate officers who receive their orders from him, and lastly, a lay membership that acknowledges the rule of this organization. The Church in this view is a religious commonwealth, only in form and operation differing from secular commonwealths. Cardinal Gibbons calls it "the Christian Republic." In Luther's view the Church is, first of all, an invisible society, known to God, the Searcher of hearts, alone. The Church of Christ is the sum-total of believers scattered through the whole world and existing in all ages. To this Church we refer when we profess in the Apostles' Creed:

"I believe one holy, Christian Church, the communion of saints."

This is the Church, the real Church, the Church which God acknowledges as the spiritual body of Christ, who is the Head of the Church, and with which He maintains the most intimate and tender relations.

This invisible Church exists within the visible societies of organized Christianity, in the local Christian congregations. Christian faith is never independent of the means which God has appointed for producing faith, the Gospel and the Sacraments. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). This faith-creating word of evangelical grace is an audible and visible matter. Its presence in any locality is cognizable by the senses. It becomes attached, moreover, by Christ's ordaining, to certain visible elements, as the water in Baptism and the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Hence these two Christian ordinances — the only two for



which a divine word of command and promise, hence, a divine institution can be shown — also become related to faith, to its origin and preservation. For of Baptism our Lord says: “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). To be “born again,” or to become a child of God, according to John 1:12, is the same as “to believe.” Accordingly, Paul says: “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26. 27). Of the Sacrament our Lord says: “This is the blood of the covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28); and His apostle declares that communicants, “as often as they eat of this bread and drink of this cup, do show the Lord’s death till He come” (1 Cor. 11:26).

The Gospel and the Sacraments, now, become the marks of the Church, the unfailing criteria of its existence in any place. For, according to the declaration of God, they are never entirely without result, though many to whom they are brought resist the gracious operation of the Spirit through these means. By Isaiah God has said: “As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Is. 55:10. 11).

Among the people who in a given locality rally around the Word and the Sacraments and profess allegiance to them, there is the Church, because there is the power of God unto salvation, the faith-producing and faith-sustaining Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who embrace what the Gospel offers with a lively faith, and in the power of their faith proceed to lead holy lives in accordance with the teaching of God’s Word, are the members of the true Church of God, the kingdom of Christ. Those who adhere only externally to these institutions are merely nominal members. They may at heart be hypocrites and secret blasphemers.

Catholic writers charge Luther with having set up this teaching, partly to spite the Pope whom he hated, partly to gratify his vainglorious aspirations to become famous. He had at one time held the Catholic dogma that the Church is the visible society of men who profess allegiance to the Bishop of Rome and accept his overlordship in matters of their religion. But through neglect of his religious duties and the failure to bridle his imperious temper

he had by degrees begun to revolt from the teaching of the Catholic Church, until he publicly renounced the Church that had existed in all the ages before him, and set up his own Church. By forsaking the communion of the Roman church organization he severed his soul from Christ and became an apostate. For, according to Catholic belief, Christ founded the Church to be a visible organization with a visible head, the Pope, and plainly and palpably “governing” men.

Everybody who has read the records of Luther’s work knows that no thought was more foreign to his mind than that of founding a new church. He believed himself in hearty accord with the Catholic Church and the Pope when he published his Theses. He did not wantonly leave the Church, but was driven from it by most ruthless measures. It was while he was defending the principles which he had first uttered against Tetzels that his eyes were opened to the appalling defection which had occurred in the Catholic Church from every true conception of what the Church really is. His appeals to the Word of God were answered by appeals to the Church, the councils of the Church, the Pope. In his unsophisticated mind Luther held that Church, councils, and Pope are all subject to Christ, the Head of the Church. They cannot teach and decree anything but what Christ has taught and ordained. It is only by abiding in the words of Christ that men become and remain the true disciples of Christ, hence, His Church (John 8:31). Now, he was told that Christ had erected the visible organization of the Catholic Church with the Pope at its head into the Church, and had handed over all authority to this society, with the understanding that there can be no appeal from this body to Christ Himself. Salvation is only by submitting to the rule of this society, adopting its ways, following its precepts. From this teaching Luther recoiled with horror, and rightly so.

At one time God had erected a theocracy on earth, a Church which was a visible society, and for which He had made special laws and ordinances. The Church of the Old Covenant is the only visible Church which God created. But even in this Church He declared that external compliance with its ways did not constitute any one a true member of His Church. He told the Jews by Isaiah:

“To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol” (chap. 66:2-8).

Here God abominates the mere external performance of acts of worship as an outrage and a crime that is perpetrated against His holy name. Repeating a saying of this same prophet, our Lord said to the members of the Jewish Church in His day:

“Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:7-9).

The Pharisees in the days of Christ are the true ancestors of Catholics in their belief that the Church is a great, powerful, visible organization in this world, subject to the supreme will of a visible ruler, and capable of being employed in great worldly enterprises like a political machine. The Pharisees were always looking for the establishment of a mighty church organization which would dominate the world. They expected the Messiah to inaugurate a Church of this kind. With this ambitious thought in their heart they approached Christ on a certain occasion and asked Him “when the kingdom of God should come. He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20. 21). To the same effect Paul declares “He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter” (Rom. 2:28. 29). And to a young pastor whom he had trained for work in the Church, he describes the Church as follows:

“The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19).

By making the Gospel the mark of the Church and faith the Gospel the badge of membership in the Church Luther has rendered an incalculable service to Christianity. This view of the Church shows the immense importance of a live, intelligent, and active personal faith. It puts a ban on religious indifference and mechanical worship. It destroys formalism, ceremonialism, Pharisaism in the affairs of religion. Justly Luther has ridiculed the implicit, or blind, faith of Catholics, when he writes:

“The papists say that they believe what the Church believes, just as it is being related of the Poles that they say: I believe what my king believes. Indeed! Could there be a better faith than this, a faith less free from worry and anxiety? They tell a story about a doctor meeting a collier on a bridge in Prague and condescendingly asking the poor layman, ‘My dear man, what do you believe?’ The collier replied, ‘Whatever the Church believes.’ The doctor: ‘Well, what does the Church believe?’ The collier: ‘What I believe.’ Some time later the doctor was about to die. In his last moments he was so fiercely assailed by the devil that he could not maintain his ground nor find rest until he said, ‘I believe what the collier believes.’ A similar story is being told of the great [Catholic theologian] Thomas Aquinas, viz., that in his last moments he was driven into a corner by the devil, and finally declared, ‘I believe what is written in this Book.’ He had the Bible in his arms while he spoke these words. God grant that not much of such faith be found among us! For if these people did not believe in a different manner, both the doctor and the collier have been landed in the abyss of hell by their faith.” (17,2013.)

Luther’s teaching regarding the Church leads to a proper valuation of the means of grace. Only through the evangelical Word and the evangelical ordinances is the Church planted, watered, and sustained. It is, therefore, necessary that the world be supplied in abundance with the Word through the missionary operations of Christians, and that the Christians themselves have the Word dwell among them richly (Col. 3:16). “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing,” says the Head of the Church to His disciples (John 15:5); and in His last prayer He pleads with the Father in their behalf: “Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17). For the same reason it is necessary that the Word and Sacraments be preserved in their Scriptural purity, that any deviation from the clear teaching of the Bible be resisted, and orthodoxy be maintained. Errors in doctrine are like tares in a wheat-field: they are useless in themselves, and they hinder the growth of good plants. Error saves no one, but some are still saved in spite of error by clinging to the truth which is offered them along with the error. Luther believed that this happened even in the error-ridden Catholic Church.

Luther’s teaching regarding the Church enables us, furthermore, to form a right estimate of the ministry in the Church. Christ wants all believers to be proclaimers of His truth and grace. The apostle whom Catholics regard as the first Pope says to all Christians:

“Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

To the local congregation of believers, which is to deal with an offending brother, even to the extent of putting him out of the church, Christ says: “If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” There is nothing that God denies even to the smallest company of believers while they are engaged in the discharge of their rights and duties as members of the Church; for Christ adds:

“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:17-20).

All rights and duties of the Church are common to all members. All have the right to preach, to administer the Sacraments, etc. Over and above this, however, Christ has instituted also a personal ministry, men who can be “sent” even as He was sent by the Father (John 20:21; comp. Rom. 10:15: “How shall they preach, except they be sent?”); men who are to devote themselves exclusively to the reading of the Word (1 Tim. 4:13), to teaching and guiding their fellow-believers in the way of divine truth (see the Epistles to Timothy and Titus). But the ministry in the Church does not represent a higher grade of Christianity,— the laymen representing the lower,— but the ministry is a service ordained for the “perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ,” viz., His Church (Eph. 4:11. 12; 1:23). *Minister* is derived from *minus*, “less,” not from *magis*— from which we have *Magister*— meaning “more.” The ministry of the Church of the New Testament is not a hierarchy, endowed with special privileges and powers by the Lord, but a body of humble workmen who serve their fellow-men and fellow-Christians in the spirit of Christ, who said: “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Ministers merely exercise in public the common rights of all believers and are the believers’ representatives in all their official acts. So Paul viewed the absolution which he pronounced upon the penitent member of the Corinthian congregation (2 Cor. 2:10). When the Corinthians had begun to exalt their preachers unduly, he told them that they were “carnal.” “Who is Paul,” he exclaims, “and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed? ...Let no man glory in men. For all things

are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours” (1 Cor. 3:4. 5. 20. 21). And Peter, the original Pope in the Catholics’ belief, says: “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Lastly, Luther’s teaching regarding the Church affords a wealth of comfort and sound direction in view of the divided condition of the visible Church. Through the ignorance and malice of men and through the wily activity of Satan, who creates divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Christ, and is busy sowing tares among the wheat, there have arisen many church organizations, known by party names, differing from one another in their creedal statements, and warring upon each other. This is a sad spectacle to contemplate, and grieves Christian hearts sorely. But these divisions in the external and visible organizations do not touch the body of Christ, the communion of saints, the one holy Christian Church. In all ages and places the true believers in Christ are a unit. Among those who by faith have “put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him, there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free; but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:10. 11). This is the true Catholic, that is, universal, Church. The visible society which has usurped this name never was, nor is today, the universal Church. Before Protestantism arose, there was the Eastern Church, which has maintained a separate organization. This holy Christian Church is indestructible, because the Word of Christ, which is its bond, shall never pass away, and Christ rules even in the midst of His enemies. Visible church organizations are valuable only in as far as they shelter, and are nurseries of, the invisible Church. Luther never conceived the idea of founding a visible organization more powerful than the Catholic; he did not mean to pit one ecclesiastical body of men against another. His single aim was to restore the purity of teaching and the right administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Scriptures. That his followers were named after him, we have shown not to be Luther’s fault: Luther did not form a Church, but reformed the Church; he did not establish a new creed,

but reestablished the old. The visible society of Lutherans today does not regard itself as the alone-saving Church, or as immune from error, or as infallible, but it does claim to be the Church of the pure Word and Sacraments. It knows that it is one in faith with all the children of God throughout the world and in all ages.

## 20. Luther on the God-Given Supremacy of the Pope

IN THE OPINION OF CATHOLICS Luther's greatest offense is what he has done to their Pope. This is Luther's unpardonable sin. Luther has done two things to the Pope: he has denied that the Pope exists by divine right, and he has in the most scurrilous manner spoken and written about the Pope and made his vaunted dignity the butt of universal ridicule. The indictment is true, but when the facts are stated, it will be seen to recoil on the heads of those who have drawn it.

Luther denies that Matt. 16:18, 19 establishes the papacy in the Church of Christ. He denies that this text creates a one-man power in the Church, that it vests one individual with a sovereign jurisdiction over the spiritual affairs of all other men, making him the sole arbiter of their faith and the exclusive dispenser of divine grace, and, last, not least, that it says one word about the Pope. Luther makes, indeed, a clean and sweeping denial of every claim which Catholics advance for the God-given supremacy of their Popes. Inasmuch as the papacy stands or falls with Matt. 16:18,19, he has put the Catholics in the worst predicament imaginable.

Catholics believe that Peter was singled out for particular honors in the Church by being declared the rock on which Christ builds His Church, and by being given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Peter's supremacy as Primate of the World, they hold, passed over to Peter's successor and is perpetuated in an unbroken line of succession in the Roman Popes. Three questions, then, confronted Luther in the study of this text in Matthew. First, does the "rock" in Matt. 16:18 signify Peter? The Lord had addressed to all His disciples the question, "Whom say ye that I am?" Instead of all of them answering and creating a confusion, Peter, the most impulsive of the apostles, speaks up and says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." With these words Peter expressed the common faith of all the disciples. Not one of them dissented from his statement; he had voiced the



joint conviction of them all. Peter was the spokesman, but the confession was that of the apostles. Any other apostle might have spoken first and said the same, had he been quicker than Peter. If there is any merit in Peter's confession of Christ, all other disciples, yea, all who confess Christ as Peter did, share that merit. In replying to Peter the Lord takes all merit away from Peter by saying to him: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." He addresses Peter by the name he had borne before he became an apostle: Simon, son of Jonas, and tells him that if he were still what he used to be before he came to Christ, he could not have made the confession which he had just uttered. In his old unconverted state he would not have formed any higher opinion concerning Christ than the people throughout the country, some of whom thought that Christ was John the Baptist risen from the dead; others, that he was Jeremias; still others, that he was one of the ancient prophets come back to life. The deity of Jesus and His mission as Christ, that is, as the Messiah, our Lord says, are grasped by men only when the Father reveals these truths to them. A spiritual nature, a new mind such as the Spirit gives in regeneration, is required for such a confession. The glory of Peter's confession, therefore, is the glory of every believer. To every Sunday-school child which recites Luther's explanation of the Second Article: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me," the Lord would say the same thing as He did to Peter: My child, yours is an excellent confession; there is nothing fickle or undecided in it like in the vague and changing opinions which worldly men form about Me. Thank God that He has given you the grace to know Me as I ought to be known.

But did not the Lord proceed to declare Peter the rock on which He would build His Church? That is what Catholics believe, in spite of the fact that this would be the only place in the whole Bible where a human being would be represented as the foundation of the Church, while there are scores of passages which name quite another person as the rock that supports the Church. Catholics read this text thus: "Thou art Peter, and *on thee* will I build My Church." That is precisely what Christ did not say, and what He was most careful not to express. The words "Peter" and "rock" are plainly two different terms and denote two different objects. That is the most natural view to take of the matter. In the original Greek we find two

words similar in sound, but distinct in meaning for the two objects to which Christ refers: Peter's name is *Petros*, which is a personal noun; the word for "rock" is *petra*, which is a common noun. In the Greek, then, Christ's answer reads thus: "Thou art *Petros*, and on this *petra* will I build my Church." Catholics claim that Christ, in answering Peter, introduced a play upon words, such as a witty person will indulge in: *Petros*, the apostle's name, signifies a rock-man, a firm person, and from this meaning it is an easy step to *petra*, which is plain rock or stone. If this interpretation is admitted, the expression "upon thee" may be substituted for the expression "on this rock." Yet not altogether. By adopting the peculiar phraseology "upon this rock" in the place of "upon thee," Christ avoids referring to the individual Peter, to the person known as Peter, and refers rather to a characteristic in him, namely, his firmness and boldness in confessing Christ. This every careful interpreter of this text will admit. Christ could easily have said: Upon thee will I build My Church, if it had been His intention to say just that. And we imagine on such a momentous occasion Christ would have used the plainest terms, containing no figure of speech, no ambiguities whatever; for was he not now introducing to the Church the distinguished person who was to preside over its affairs? Catholics claim that when Christ spoke these words, "upon this rock," He had extended His hand and was pointing to Peter. That would help us considerably in the interpretation of the text. The trouble is only that we are not told anything about such a gesture of Christ, and if a gesture must be invented, it is possible to invent an altogether different one, as we shall see. But if Christ, by saying, "upon this rock," instead of saying, "upon thee," referred not to Peter as a person, but to a quality in Peter, namely, to his firm faith, then it follows that the Church is not built on the person of Peter, but on a quality of Peter. This is the best that Catholics can obtain from the interpretation which they have attempted. But if the Church is built on firm faith, there is no reason why that faith should be just Peter's. Would not every firm believer in the deity and Redeemership of Christ become the rock on which the Church is built just as much as Peter? Luther declared quite correctly: "We are all Peters if we believe like Peter." Really, the Catholics ought to be willing to help strengthen the foundation of the Church by admitting that the rock would become a stouter support if, instead of the firm faith of one man, the equally firm faith of hundreds, thousands, and millions of other men were added to prop up the Church. In all seriousness, it will be

absolutely necessary to give Peter some assistants; for we know that the job of holding up the Church was too big for him on at least two occasions. What became of the Church in the night when Peter denied the Lord? In that night, the Catholics would have to believe, the Church was built on a liar and blasphemer. What became of the Church in the days when Peter came to Antioch and Paul withstood him to the face because he was dissembling his Christian convictions not to offend a Judaizing party in the Church? (Gal. 2.) Was the Church in those days built on a canting hypocrite?

But the greatest difficulty in admitting the Catholic interpretation is met when one remembers those Bible-texts which name an altogether different rock as the foundation and corner-stone of the Church. Paul says that in their desert wanderings the Israelites were accompanied by Christ. He was their unseen Guide and Benefactor. He supported their faith. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount the Lord relates a parable about a wise and a foolish builder. The foolish builder set up his house on sand; the wise builder built on rock. By the rock, however, the Lord would have us understand "these sayings of Mine" (Matt. 7:24). Paul speaks of the Church to the Ephesians thus: "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone" (chap. 2:20). Most fatal, however, to the Catholic interpretation is the testimony of Peter. Exhorting the Christians to eager study of the Word of the Lord, he goes on to say: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe He is precious, but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient" (1 Pet. 2:4-8). Here Peter in the plainest and strongest terms declares Christ to be the rock on which the Church is built. The scribes and Pharisees rejected Him, as had been foretold, but the common people who heard Him gladly embraced His message of salvation, and rested their faith on what He had

taught them and done for them. Peter evidently did not understand the text in Matthew as the Catholics understand it. Peter in his Epistle is really a heretic in what he says about the rock, and if the Catholics could spare him from under the Church, they ought to burn him.

Instead of connecting the two parts of the statement: "Thou art Peter," and, "Upon this rock I will build My Church," as closely as Catholics do, the two parts ought to be kept separate. What the Lord says to Peter may be paraphrased thus: Peter, there was a time when you were merely Simon, Jonas's son. At that time you had thoughts and formed opinions about holy matters such as your flesh and blood, your natural reason, suggested to you. All that is changed now that you are a Peter, a firm believer in the revelation which the Father makes to men about Me. What you have confessed is the exact truth; cling to that against all odds; for upon this person whom you have confessed, as upon a rock, I will build My Church.— And now we may imagine that the Lord, while uttering the words, "upon this rock," pointed to Himself. The text does not say that the Lord made such a gesture; we simply imagine this, but our imagination is not only just as good as that of the Catholics, but better, for the gesture which we assume agrees with the teachings of all the Scriptures that speak of Christ's person and work.

However, the Catholics remind us that Christ gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven and made him the doorkeeper of paradise. Yes, so the text reads, and with Luther we should now inquire: Was it a brass, or silver, or golden, or wooden key? Is the lock on the gate of heaven a common padlock, or like the cunning contrivances which are nowadays employed in safety vaults? Catholics are very much offended when one speaks thus of the keys of Peter. They say sarcasm is out of place in such holy matters. That is quite true; but, again with Luther, we would urge that the keys of which we are speaking sarcastically are not the keys in Matt. 16:10, but the keys in the Catholic imagination. And these latter one can hardly treat with reverence. The Catholics must admit that no real key, or anything resembling a key, was given to Peter by Christ. The language in this text is figurative: the words which follow state the Lord's meaning in plain terms. The power of the keys is the preaching of the forgiveness of sins to penitent sinners, and the withholding of grace from those who do not repent. If that is admitted to be the meaning, we need turn only one leaf in our Bible, and read what is stated in Matt. 18:18. There the Lord confers the

same authority on all the disciples which He is said in Matt. 16:19 to have conferred on Peter exclusively. On this latter occasion Peter, if the Catholics have the right view of the keys, ought to have interposed an objection and said to the Lord, What you give to the others is my property. Evidently Peter did not connect the same meaning with the words of Christ about the keys as the Catholics. Christ spoke of this matter once more, and in terms still plainer, at the meeting on Easter Eve, and again addressed all the disciples. Again Peter made no complaint. (John 20.)

It should be noted , moreover, that in this entire text in Matthew the Lord speaks in the future tense: “I will build,” “I will give.” The words do not really confer a grant, but are at best a promise. It is necessary now that the Catholics find a complement to this text in Matthew, a text which relates that Christ actually carried out later what He promised to Peter in Matt. 16:18. 19. The Lord seems to have forgotten the fulfillment of His promise, and the matter seems to have slipped Peter’s mind, too; for we are not told that he reminded the Lord of His promise, though he asked him on another occasion what would be the reward of his discipleship. (Matt. 19:27 ff.)

Luther has, furthermore, appealed to the Catholics to prove from the Scriptures that Peter ever exercised such an authority as they claim for him. If Peter had been created the prince of the apostles or the visible head of the Church, we should expect to find evidence in our Bible that Peter acted as a privileged person and was so regarded by the other apostles. But we may read through the entire book of Acts and all the apostolic epistles: they tell us very minutely how the Church was planted in many lands, how it grew and spread, but there is not even a faint hint that Peter was regarded as the primate, or Pope, in his day. When a certain question of doctrine was to be decided in which the congregations of Paul were interested, Paul did not lay the matter before Peter to obtain his judgment on it, but referred it to a council of the Church. At this council many spoke, and it was not Peter’s, but James’s speech which finally decided the matter. (Acts 15.) When Philip had organized congregations in Samaria, the church at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to visit them. Peter did not assume control of these churches by his own right, nor had Philip in the first place directed the Samaritans to Peter as their head. (Acts 8:14 ff.) We have thirteen letters of Paul, three of John, besides the Revelation, one of James, and one of Jude. The state of the Church, its affairs and development, are the subject-matter of all these writings, but not one of them reveals the popedom of Peter. Yea, Peter

himself has written two epistles and appears utterly ignorant of the fact that the Lord had created him His vicegerent and the visible head of the Church.

The Catholic argument for the God-given supremacy of their Pope, however, becomes perfectly reckless when we bear in mind that their banner text speaks only of Peter, but says nothing at all about Peter's successors. If Peter possessed the supremacy that Catholics claim for him, how and by what right did he dispose of it at his death? How did this power become attached to Rome? On all these questions the Bible is silent. Catholics construct a skillful argument from fragmentary and doubtful historical records, which are not God's Word, to show that Peter chose Rome as his episcopal see, and therewith transferred his primacy for all time to this place. To fabricate a dogma that is to be binding on the consciences of all Christians in such a way is daring impudence. The devout Catholic must close his eyes to all history if he is to believe that Christ really appointed a Pope. When he reads the history of the Popes, and comes to the period of the papal schism, when the Church had not only one, but two visible heads, one residing at Rome, the other at Avignon, yea, when he reads of three contestants for papal honors, and beholds the Church as a tricephalous monster, he must stop thinking.

Luther regarded the papacy as the most monstrous fraud that has been practiced on Christianity. In its gradual and persistent development and the success with which it has maintained itself through all reverses, it impresses one as something uncanny. It requires more than human wiliness to originate, foster, perfect, and support such a thoroughly unbiblical and antichristian institution. Luther spoke of the papal deception as one of the signs foreboding the end of the world. He has not spoken in delicate terms of the Popes. His most virulent utterances are directed against the "Vicar of Christ" at Rome. He traces the papacy to diabolical origin. When he lays bare the shocking perversions of revealed truths of which Rome has been guilty, and talks about the foul practices of the Popes and their courtesans, Luther's language becomes appalling. In a series of twenty-six cartoons Luther's friend Cranach depicted the rule of Christ and Antichrist. The series was published under the title "Passional Christi und Antichristi." (14:184 ff.) By placing alongside of one another scenes from the life of the Lord and scenes from the lives of the Popes, the artist displayed very effectually the contrast between the true religion which the Redeemer had taught men by His Word and example, and the false religiousness which

was represented by the papacy. On the one side was humility, on the other, pride; poverty was shown in contrast with wealth; meekness was placed over and against arrogance, etc. At a glance the people saw the chasm that yawned between the preaching and practice of Jesus and that of His pretended representative and vicar, and they verified the pictures showing the Pope in various attitudes from their own experience. These cartoons became very popular, and have maintained their popularity till the most recent times. During the "Kulturkampf" which the German government under Bismarck waged against the aggressive policy of the Vatican, the German painter Hofmann issued a new edition of the "Passionale," and Emperor William I sent a copy to the Pope with a warning letter.

Catholics complain about the rudeness and nastiness of these cartoons and others that followed. Luther is supposed to have furnished the rhymes and descriptive matter which accompanied them. Luther is also cited as uttering most repulsive and scurrilous sentiments about the Pope.

What are we to say about this antipapal violence of Luther? Certainly, it is not a pleasant subject. We are in this instance facing essentially the same situation as that which confronted us when we studied Luther's "coarseness" (chap. 5), and all that was said in that connection applies with equal force to the subject now before us. One may deplore the necessity of these passionate outbursts ever so much, but when all the evidence in the case has been gathered and the jury begins to sift the evidence and weigh the arguments on either side, there is at the worst a drawn jury. All who have truly sounded "the mystery of iniquity" which has been set up in the Church by the papacy will affirm Luther's sentiments about the Pope as true.

It is necessary, however, to point out certain facts that may be regarded as additional argument to what was said in chap. 5. In the first place, the cartoon is a recognized weapon in polemics. The struggle of the Protestants against the Pope was not altogether a religious and spiritual one; political matters were discussed together with affairs of religion at every German diet in those days. The age was rude and largely illiterate. Many who could never have made any sense out of a page of printed matter, very easily understood a picture. It conveyed truthful information, though in a form that hurt, as cartoons usually do, and it roused a healthy sentiment against a very malignant evil in the Church and in the body politic. If the Popes would

keep out of politics, they and their followers would enjoy more quiet nerves.

In the second place, it should be borne in mind that the claim of papal supremacy is no small and innocent matter. The Popes wrested to themselves the supreme spiritual and temporal power in the world. They pretended to be the custodians of heaven, the directors of purgatory, and the lords of the earth. Across the history of the world in the era of Luther is written in all directions the one word ROME. It is Rome at the altar swinging the censer, Rome in the panoply of battle storming trenches and steeping her hands in gore, Rome in the councils of kings, Rome in the halls of guilds, Rome in the booth of the trader at a town-fair, Rome in the judge's seat, Rome in the professor's chair, Rome receiving ambassadors from, and dispatching nuncios to, foreign courts, Rome dictating treaties to nations and arranging the cook's *menu*, Rome labeling the huckster's cart and the vintner's crop, Rome levying a tax upon the nuptial bed, Rome exacting toll at the gate of heaven. Out of the wreck of the imperial Rome of the Caesars has risen papal Rome. Once more, though through different agents, the City of the Seven Hills is ruling an *orbis terrarum Romanus*, a Roman world-empire. The rule extends through nearly a thousand years. How deftly do cunning priests manipulate every means at their command to increase their power! Learning, wealth, beauty, art, piety,— everything is used as an asset in the ambitious game for absolute supremacy which the mitered vicegerent of Christ is playing against the world. Rome's ancient *pontifex maximus* — the pagan high priest of the Rome before Christ — had been a tool of the consuls and the Caesars; the new pontiff makes the Caesars his tools. Princes kiss his feet and hold the stirrup for him as he mounts his bedizened palfrey. An emperor stands barefoot in the snow of the Pope's courtyard suing pardon for having dared to govern without the Pope's sanction.— The forests of Germany are reverberating with the blows of axes which Rome's missionaries wield against Donar's Oaks. The sanctuaries of pagan Germany are razed. Out of the wood of idols crucifixes are erected along the highways. Chapels and abbeys and cathedrals rise where the aurochs was hunted. Sturdy barbarians bend the knee at the shrines of saints. Hosts set out to see the land where the Lord had walked and suffered, and brave all dangers and hardships to wrest its possession from infidel hands. But at the place where all these activities center, and whence they are being fed, a shocking abomination is seen: Venus is



worshiped, and Bacchus, and Mercurius, and Mars, while white-robed choirs chant praises to the mother of God, and clouds of incense are wafted skyward. Here is a mystery — a mystery of iniquity: the son of perdition in the temple of God! Proud, haughty Rome, wealthy, wicked and wanton, is filling up her measure of wrath against the day of retribution.— We are now so far removed from these scenes that they seem unreal; in Luther’s days they were decidedly real. Rome’s aggressiveness has been perceptibly checked during the last four centuries; in Luther’s days papal pretensions were a more formidable proposition.

Human arrogance may be said to have reached its limit in the papacy. The Pope is practically a God on earth. “Sitting in the temple of God as God, he is showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). He has been addressed by his followers in terms of the Deity. “When the Pope thinks, it is God thinking,” wrote the papal organ of Rome, the *Civiltà Cattolica*, in 1869. He has asserted the right to make laws for Christians, and to dispense with the laws of the Almighty. Although this seemed a superfluous proceeding, he declared himself infallible on July 18, 1870. Under a glowering sky, as if Heaven frowned angrily at the Pope’s attempt, Plus IX had entered St. Peter’s. As a “second Moses” he mounted the papal throne to read the Constitution “*Aeternus Pater*,” the document in which he made the following claims: Canon III: “If any one says that the Roman Pontiff has only authority to inspect and direct, but not plenary and supreme authority of jurisdiction over the entire Church, not only in matters which relate to faith and morals, but also in matters that belong to the discipline and government of the Church scattered through the whole earth; or that he has only the more eminent part of such authority, but not the full plenitude of this supreme authority; or that this authority of his is not his ordinary authority which he holds from no intermediary, and that it does not extend over all churches and every single one of them, over all pastors and every single one of them, over all the faithful and every single one of them, – let him be accursed!” Canon IV: “With the approval of the Sacred Council we teach and declare it to be a dogma revealed from heaven that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in accordance with his supreme apostolic authority, he discharges his office as Pastor and Teacher of all Christians, and defines a doctrine relating to the faith or morals which is to be embraced by the entire Church, he is, by divine assistance promised to him in the blessed Peter, vested with that infallibility with which the

divine Redeemer desired His Church to be endowed in defining the doctrine of faith and morals; and that for this reason such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are in their very nature, not, however, by reason of the consent of the Church, unchangeable. If — which God may avert!— any one should presume to contradict this definition of ours,— let him be accursed!” Amid flashes of lightning and peals of thunder this document was read to a council whose membership had shrunk during seven months of deliberation from 767 to 547 attendants,—277 qualified members had never put in an appearance,— and of these all but two had been cowed into abject submission. When one recalls scenes like these, and remembers that Catholic teaching on justification attacks the very heart of Christianity, anything that Luther has said about the Popes appears mild. Such heaven-storming and God-defying arrogance deserves to be dragged through the mire — with apologies to the mire.

# 21. Luther the Translator of the Bible

A VIOLENT ATTACK UPON LUTHER by Catholic writers is caused by the admiration which Protestants manifest for Luther because he translated the Bible into German. Catholics, of course, cannot deny that Luther did translate the Bible, and that his translation is still a cherished treasure of Protestants; but in order to belittle this achievement of Luther, which inflicted incalculable damage on Rome, they talk about Luther's unfitness for the work of Bible-translation and about the unwarranted liberties Luther took with the Bible.

These writers claim that Luther was, in the first place, morally unfit to undertake the translation of the Bible. To show to what desperate means Luther's Catholic critics will resort in order to make out a case against him, we note that one of the most recent disparagers of Luther informs the public that Luther's original name had been Luder. This name conveys the idea of "carrion," "beast," "low scoundrel." When Luther began to translate the Bible, we are told, he changed his name into "Squire George." Once before this, at the time of his entering the university, Catholics note that he changed his name from Luder to Lueder. But these changes of his name, they say, did not improve his character. We are told that, while Luther was engaged upon the work of rendering the Bible into German, he was consumed with fleshly lust and given to laziness. Luther's own statements in letters to friends are cited to corroborate this assertion. The conclusion which we are to draw from these "facts" is this: Such a corrupt person could not possibly be a proper instrument for the Holy Spirit to employ in so pious an undertaking as the translation of the Word of God.

Catholics should be reminded that they misquote the book of matriculation in which the students at Erfurt signed their names on entering the university. Luther's signature is not "Lueder" but "Ludher." Other forms of the name "Luder" and "Lueder" occur elsewhere. But in any form the

name has a more honorable derivation and meaning than Catholic writers are inclined to give it. It is derived from "Luither," which means as much as "People's Man," (= *der Leute Herr*). Another well-known form of the same name is Lothar, which some, tracing the derivation still further, derive from the old German *li*, which means as much as "loudly hailed among the army" (= *hluit*, loud, and *chari*, army). Respectable scholars today so explain the name Luther.

At the Wartburg, where Luther was an exile for ten months, his name was changed by the warden of the castle, Count von Berlepsch. This was done the better to conceal his identity from the henchmen of Rome, who by the imperial edict of outlawry had been given liberty to hunt Luther and slay him where they found him.

The sexual condition of Luther during the years before his marriage was the normal condition of any healthy young man at his age. Luther speaks of this matter as a person nowadays would speak about it to his physician or to a close friend. The matter to which he refers is in itself perfectly pure: it is an appeal of nature. Do Luther's Catholic critics mean to infer that Luther was the only monk, then or now, that felt this call which human nature issues by the ordination of the Creator? Rome can inflict celibacy even on priests that look like stall-fed oxen, but she cannot unsex men. Mohammedans are less inhuman to their eunuchs. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that Luther complains of this matter as something that disturbs him. It vexed his pure mind, and he fought against it as not many monks of his day have done, by fasting, prayer, and hard work. Yes, hard work! The remarks of Luther about his physical condition are simply twisted from their true import when Luther is represented as a victim of fleshly lust and a habitual debauchee. Luther's Catholic critics fail to mention that during his brief stay at the Wartburg Luther not only translated the greater part of the New Testament, but also wrote about a dozen treatises, some of them of considerable size, and that of his correspondence during this period about fifty letters are still preserved. Surely, a fairly respectable record for a lazy man!

Catholic writers also declare Luther spiritually unfit for translating the Bible. They say that all the time that Luther spent at the Wartburg he was haunted by the devil. He would hear strange noises and see weird shadows flit before him. He felt that he had come under the sway of the powers of darkness. This, we are assured, was because he had risen in rebellion

against the divine power of the papacy. The Holy Father whom he had attacked was being avenged upon Luther by an accusing conscience. Luther was given a foretaste of the terrors that await the reprobate. He had become an incipient demoniac. The inference which we are to draw from this delightful description is this: Could such an abandoned wretch as Luther was during the exile at the Wartburg be favored with the holy calm and composure and the heavenly light which any person must possess who sets out upon the arduous task of telling men in their own tongue what God has said to them in a foreign tongue?

There is hardly a period in Luther's life that is entirely free from spiritual affliction. In this respect Luther shares the common lot of godly men in responsible positions in Church or State during critical times. Moreover, Luther with all Christians believed in a personal and incessantly active devil. Luther's devil was not the denatured metaphysical and scientific devil of modern times, which meets us in the form of the principle of negation, or logical contradiction, or a demoralizing tendency and influence, but an energetic devil, possessed of an intelligence and will of his own, and going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Luther accepted the teaching of the Bible that this devil is related to men's sinning, that men can be made to do, and are doing, his will, and are led about by the devil like slaves. Luther knew that for His own reasons God permits the devil to afflict His children, as happened to Job and Paul. Add to this the reaction that must have set in after Luther had quitted the stirring scenes and the severe ordeals through which he had passed before the imperial court at Worms. In the silence and solitude of his secluded asylum in the Thuringian Forest the recent events in which he had been a principal actor passed in review before his mind, and he began to spell out many a grave and ominous meaning from them. If it is true that the devil loves to find a lonely man, here was his chance.

And if the devil ever had material interests at stake in attacking a particular person, he made no mistake in assailing this isolated monk, Martin Luther, in his moments of brooding and depression. Lastly, Luther's physical condition at the Wartburg must be taken into consideration. Trained to frugal habits in the cloister and habituated to fasts and mortification of the flesh, Luther found the new mode of living which he was compelled to adopt uncongenial. He was the guest of a prince and was treated like a nobleman. The rich and abundant food that was served him

was a disastrous diet for him, even though he did not yield overmuch to his appetite. He complains in his letters to friends during the Wartburg period about his physical distress, chiefly constipation, to which he was constitutionally prone.

But after all these elements have been noted, it must be stated that the reports about diabolical visitations to which Luther was subject at the Wartburg are overdrawn for a purpose by Catholics. Luther's references to this matter in his letters written at the time suggest only spiritual conflicts, but no physical contact with the devil. Reminiscences of his first exile which he relates at a much later period to the guests at his table are also exaggerated. These soul-battles, far from unfitting him for the work of translating the Bible, were rather a fine training-school through which God put His humble servant, and helped him to understand the sacred text over which he sat poring in deep meditation.

Lastly, Catholic critics have pronounced Luther intellectually disqualified for translating the Bible. His Greek scholarship, they say, was poor. He had barely begun to study that language. It stands to reason that his translation must be very faulty. They also emphasize the rapidity with which Luther worked. The translation of the entire New Testament was completed between December 8:1521, and September 22 the following year. (It will be remembered that Luther had returned to Wittenberg in the first days of March, 1522, and all through the spring and summer of that year was busily engaged, with the aid of friends, on his German New Testament.) Finally, Catholics, in their efforts to belittle Luther's works, have claimed that he plagiarized a German translation already in existence, the so-called *Codex Teplensis*.

It seems a mere waste of time to answer these criticisms. They remind one of a scene in the life of Columbus: the learned Catholic divines of Salamanca had to their own satisfaction routed the bold navigator with their arguments that he could not possibly start out by his proposed route. No doubt, some of them contended that he never made his famous voyage even after his return. What profit can there be in arguing the impossibility of a thing when the reality confronts you? Luther's translation is before the world; everybody who knows Greek can compare it with the original text. The Teplensian translation, too, can be looked into. In fact, all this has been done by competent scholars, and Luther's translation has been pronounced a masterpiece. Not only does it reproduce the original text faithfully, but it

speaks a good and correct German. Luther's translation of the Bible is now regarded as one of the classics of German literature. It is true that the philological attainments of the world have increased since Luther, and that improvements in his translations have been suggested, but they do not affect any essential teaching of the Christian religion. Bible commentators today are still citing Luther's rendering as an authority. The movement recently started in Germany to replace Luther's translation by a modern one deserves little consideration because it originated in quarters that are professedly hostile to Christianity. The things in Luther's German Bible which vex Catholics most are in the original Greek text. Luther did not manufacture them, he merely reproduced them. It is the fact that Luther made it possible for Germans to see what is really in the Bible that hurts. To please the Catholics, Luther should not have translated the Bible at all.

The truth of this remark is readily seen when one examines specific exceptions which Catholics have taken to Luther's translation. They find fault with Luther's translation of the angel's address to Mary: "Du Holdselige," that is, Thou gracious one, or well-favored one. The Catholics demand that this term should be rendered "full of grace," because in their belief Mary is really the chief dispenser of grace. They complain that in Matt. 3:2 Luther has rendered the Baptist's call: "Tut Busse," that is, Repent, instead of, Do penance. They fault Luther for translating in Acts 19:18: "*Und verkuendigten, was sie ausgerichtet hatten,*" that is, They reported what they had accomplished. Catholics regard this text as a stronghold for their doctrine of confession, especially for that part of it which makes satisfaction by works of penance a part of confession; they insist that the text must be rendered: They declared their deeds, that is, the works which they had performed by order of their confessors. Catholics charge Luther with having inserted a word in Rom. 4:15, which he translates: "Das Gesetz richtet nur Zorn an," that is, The law worketh only wrath, or nothing but wrath. They object to the word "only," because in their view man can by his own natural powers make himself love the Law. They set up a great hue and cry about another insertion in Rom. 3:28, which Luther translates: "*So halten wir es nun, dass der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werk', allein durch den Glauben,*" that is, We conclude, therefore, that a man is justified without the deeds of the Law, by faith alone; they object to the word "alone," because in their teaching justification is by faith plus works. It is known that there are translations

before Luther which contain the same insertion. On this insertion Luther deserves to be heard himself. "I knew full well," he says, "that in the Latin and Greek texts of Rom. 3:28 the word *solum* (alone) does not occur, and there was no need of the papists teaching me that. True, these four letters *sola*, at which the dunces stare as a cow at a new barn-door, are not in the text. But they do not see that they express the meaning of the text, and they must be inserted if we wish to clearly and forcibly translate the text. When I undertook to translate the Bible into German, my aim was to speak German, not Latin or Greek. Now, it is a peculiarity of our German language, whenever a statement is made regarding two things, one of which is affirmed while the other is negated, to add the word *solum*, 'alone,' to the word 'not' or 'none.' As, for instance: The peasant brings only grain, and no money. Again: Indeed, I have no money now, but only grain. As yet I have only eaten, and not drunk. Have you only written, and not read what you have written? Innumerable instances of this kind are in daily usage. While the Latin or the Greek language does not do this, the German has this peculiarity, that in all statements of this kind it adds the word 'only' (or 'alone'), in order to express the negation completely and clearly. For, though I may say: The peasant brings grain and no money, still the expression 'no money' is not as perfect and plain as when I say: The peasant brings grain only, and no money. Thus the word 'alone' or 'only' helps the word 'no' to become a complete, clear German statement. When you wish to speak German, you must not consult the letters in the Latin language, as these dunces are doing, but you must inquire of a mother how she talks to her children, of the children how they talk to each other on the street, of the common people on the market-place. Watch them how they frame their speech, and make your translation accordingly, and they will understand it and know that some one is speaking German to them. For instance, Christ says: *Ex abundantia cordis os loquitur*. If I were to follow the dunces, I would have to spell out those words and translate: 'Aus dem Ueberfluss des Herzens redet der Mund!' Tell me, would that be German? What German would understand that? What sort of thing is 'abundance of heart (*Ueberfluss des Herzens*)' ? No German person could explain that, unless he were to say that, possibly, the person had enlargement of the heart, or too much heart. And that would not be the correct meaning. '*Ueberfluss des Herzens*' is not German, as little as it is German to say '*Ueberfluss des Hauses* (abundance of house), *Ueberfluss des Kachelofens*



(abundance of tile-oven), *Ueberfluss der Bank* (abundance of bench).’ This is the way the mother speaks to her children and the common people to one another: ‘*Wes das Herz voll ist, des gehet der Mund ueber.*’ That is the way to speak good German. That is what I have endeavored to do, but I did not succeed nor achieve my aim in all instances. Latin terms are an exceedingly great hindrance to one who wishes to talk good German.” (19:974.)

In insisting on the principle that a translation must reproduce the exact thought of a language, that idiomatic utterances of the one language must be replaced by similar utterances in the other, and that the genius of both the language from which and the one into which the translation is made must be observed by the translator, Luther has every rhetoric and grammar on his side. Those who find fault with him on this score deserve no better titles than those which he applied to them, all the more because he knew the true reason of their faultfinding. The Catholic charges of Bible perversion against Luther flow, not from a knowledge of good grammar, but from bad theology. Luther was, of course, fundamentally in error according to the opinion of Catholics by not making his translation from the approved and authorized Latin Vulgate, the official Catholic Bible, but from the Greek original.

To return favor for favor, we shall note a few places where Catholics might bring their own Bible into better harmony with the original text. In Gen. 3:15 their translation reads: “She shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.” This rendering has been adopted in order to enable them to refer this primeval prophecy of the future Redeemer to Mary. Gen. 4:13 they have rendered: “My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon.” This is to favor their teaching of justification on the basis of merit. The rendering “Speak not much” for “Use not vain repetitions” in Matt. 6:7 weakens the force of the Lord’s warning. In Rom. 14:5 the Catholic Bible tells its readers: “Let every man abound in his own sense,” whatever the sense of that direction may be. What the apostle really means is: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” In Gal. 3:24 the Catholic Bible calls the Law “our pedagogue in Christ”; the correct rendering is: “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.” In the Catholic Bible the following remarkable event takes place in Luke 16:22: “The rich man also died: and he was buried in hell.” The pall-bearers, funeral director, and mourners at these obsequies deserve a double portion of our sympathy. In Acts 2:42 we are told that the disciples at Jerusalem were persevering “in

the communication of the breaking of the bread.” The last verse in Galatians, chap. 4, is made to read: “So then, brethren, we are not the children of the bondwoman, but of the free: by the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free.” The next chapter begins: “Stand fast,” etc.

Luther has expressed opinions of certain books of the Bible which question their divine authorship. These opinions are being assiduously canvassed by Catholic writers to prove that Luther accepted only such portions of the Bible as suited his purpose, and rejected all the rest as spurious. He is said to have arrogated to himself the authority to declare any book of the Scriptures inspired or not inspired, and is, therefore, justly regarded as the father of the higher criticism of modern times, which has taken the Bible to pieces and destroyed its power. But Catholic writers fail to state that the uncertainty which Luther occasionally manifests regarding the divine origin and authenticity of certain books of the Bible is due to the confusion which the Catholic Church has created by decreeing that the apocryphal books shall be considered on a par with the canonical writings of the Bible. Setting aside the verdict of the ancient Church, and even of their famous church-father Jerome, the Catholic Church has by an arbitrary decree ruled the following books into the Bible: 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Rest of Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, with the Epistle of Jeremiah, The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The Prayer of Manasses, 1 and 2 Maccabees. These writings are called apocrypha because their divine origin is in doubt. Scrupulously careful to keep the divinely inspired writings separate from all other writings, no matter how godly their contents might seem to be, the Church of the Old Covenant excluded these writings from the canon, that is, from the list of fully accredited inspired writings. Besides, in the Catholic Bible in Luther’s days there were apocryphal portions inserted in canonical writings like Esther.

In the course of his studies Luther learned that certain writings in the Catholic Bible represented as Biblical were no part of the Bible. Acting upon the direction which the Lord gave to the Jews: “Search the Scriptures ...they are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39), he considered this a good test of the genuineness of any portion of the Bible, viz., that it conveyed to him knowledge of Christ and the way of salvation. The Bible, he held, can speak only for, never against Christ. By this principle he determined for himself the respective value of various writings in the Bible. Ecclesiastes

and Jonah did not appeal to him as very full of Christ. In the New Testament he seems strongly attracted by the Gospel of John. But there are statements in his writings in which he expresses a preference for Matthew, Mark, and Luke. One must understand Luther's view-point and aim on a given occasion to grasp these valuations. In regard to Job he expressed the opinion that the book is dramatic rather than historical: it does not relate actual occurrences, but rather points a moral in the form of a narrative. In the New Testament the overgreat emphasis which he thought James placed on works as against faith caused him to depreciate this Epistle and to question its apostolic authorship. Luther also knew that in the earliest centuries of the Christian era the question had been raised whether Second Peter, Jude, James, Revelation, really belonged in the canon.

Unbiased readers will see in all these remarks of Luther nothing but the earnest struggle of a sincere soul to get at the real Word of God. A person may express a preference for certain portions of the Bible without declaring all the rest of the Bible worthless. Doubts concerning the divine character of certain portions of the Scripture arise and are occasionally expressed by the best of Christians. But Luther's critical attitude toward certain books of the Bible is either misunderstood or misrepresented when it is made to appear that Luther permanently rejected, or tore out of his Bible, such books as Esther, Jonah, Ecclesiastes, Second Peter, James, Hebrews, Jude, and Revelation. Some Catholics go so far as to charge Luther with having rejected the Pentateuch, the first five books in the Bible, because he speaks slightly of Moses' law as a means of justification. Not only did Luther translate and take into his German Bible all the writings just named, but he also cites them in his doctrinal writings as proof-texts. In the Index of Scripture citations which Dr. Hoppe, the editor of the only complete edition of Luther's works printed in America, has added to the last volume we find 11 such references to Job, 12 to Ecclesiastes, 6 to Jonah, 48 to Second Peter, 18 to James, 6 to Jude, 61 to Hebrews, 17 to Revelation. We have counted only such references as show that Luther employed these writings as divine in his doctrinal arguments. By actual enumeration it would be found that he has referred to them much more frequently. On Jonah, Second Peter, and Jude he wrote special commentaries, and for all the books of the Bible he furnished illuminating summaries, in some cases, as in Revelation, the summaries are furnished chapter for chapter. This goes to prove that Luther had ultimately reached very clear and settled opinions regarding the

authenticity and divine character of those books of the Bible which he is charged with having blasphemously criticized. Luther's criticism of these portions of the Bible is the most respectable criticism that has come to our knowledge. It shows his scrupulous care not to admit anything as being God's Word of the divine origin of which he was not fully convinced. It is Rome, not Luther, that has vitiated the Bible and created confusion in Christian minds, by admitting into the sacred volume portions which do not belong there.

Luther's questioning attitude towards the books of the Bible, which we have named is the attitude of the early Christians. There was doubt expressed in the first centuries as to the genuineness of these books, and it required convincing information in those days when facilities for communication were poor to secure the adoption of the books which we now have in the Bible. Why do not the Catholics embrace the early Christians in their charge of Bible mutilation? Nor were those early Christians who questioned the divine authorship of certain books about the origin of which they had no definite knowledge any less Christian than those who had convincing information about them. For the former possessed in the writings which they had accepted as authentic the same truths which the latter had embraced.

Luther voices his profound reverence for the Scriptures in innumerable places throughout his writings. "The Holy Scriptures," he says, "did not grow on earth." (7:2094.) Again: "When studying the Scriptures, you must reflect that it is God Himself who is speaking to you." (3:21.) Again: "The Scriptures are older and possess greater authority than all Councils and Fathers. Moreover, all the angels side with God and the Scriptures... If age, duration, greatness, multitude [of followers], holiness, are inducements to believe something, why do we believe men who live but a short time rather than God, who is the Oldest, the Greatest, the Holiest, the Mightiest of all? Why do we not believe all the angels, since a single one of them has greater authority than the Pope? Why do we not believe the Bible, when one passage of Scripture outweighs all the books in the world?" (19:1734.) Again: "The Bible alone is the true lord and master over all writings on earth. If this is not so, of what use is the Bible? Then let us cast it aside, and be satisfied with the books and teachings of men." (15:1481.) Again: "All Scripture is full of Christ, the Son of God and Mary. Its sole object is to teach us to know Him as a distinct person, and that through Him we may in

eternity behold the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God. The Scriptures are ajar to him who has the Son, and in the same proportion as his faith in Christ increases the Scriptures become clear to him" (3, 1959.) How little Luther would have in common with the destructive higher critics of the Bible in our day, we can gather from the following statement: "If cutting and tearing the Bible to pieces were a great art, what a famous Bible would I produce! Especially if I were to lay my hand on the important passages, those on which the articles of our faith rest.

...My position, then, is this: In view of the fact that our faith is supported by Holy Writ, we must not depart from its words as they read, nor from the order in which they are placed... Otherwise, what is to become of the Bible?" (20:213.)

## 22. Luther a Preacher of Violence against the Hierarchy

IN HIS FIGHT against papal supremacy Luther discovered that the Roman priesthood was the Pope's chief support. The principle of community of interests had knitted both the higher and the lower clergy, the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors, parish priests, monks, etc., together into one firmly compacted society. All its members understood that they were working in a common cause, and kept in constant and close rapport with one another: What concerned one concerned all the rest. Each aided and abetted the other, and all strove jointly to exalt their master, the Pope. Like a huge net the rule of priests was spread over mankind, and all men, with their spiritual and secular interests, were caught in this net. The system was called a hierarchy, that is, a holy government. The priesthood and the holy orders were the Pope's collateral. All its members derived what authority they possessed from the Pope; their fortunes were bound up in the Pope's. This priest-rule Luther overthrew by causing men to see the liberty with which Christ has made them free. Catholic critics claim that by so doing Luther rebelled against an ordinance of God. We have shown in chapter 18 that Luther acknowledges in the Church of Christ a ministry that exists by divine appointment. Hence the Catholic charge that Luther revolted from God when he disputed the divine right of the hierarchy is silly.

However, Luther is said to have "recklessly encouraged the destruction of the episcopate, and openly commanded sacrilege and murder" to mobs. The appeal of Luther that the *rule* of bishops be exterminated is interpreted to mean that the bishops be exterminated. This is one of the most wanton charges that could be preferred against Luther. By the Theses against Tetzl the attention of many prominent men in Germany was attracted to Luther. Princes and noblemen of the Empire had for some time been studying from a secular point of view the evils which Luther had begun to attack on

spiritual grounds. These men understood the character of the Roman hierarchy much better than Luther. They saw at once that Luther's action would lead to serious complication that might ultimately have to be settled with the sword. When Luther was still dreaming about convincing the Pope with arguments from Scripture, German noblemen were preparing to defend him against physical violence. They knew that the hierarchy would not without a fierce struggle submit to any curtailment of their power. They offered Luther armed support. Luther recoiled with horror from this suggestion. In a letter from the Wartburg which he wrote to his friend Spalatin who was still tarrying at Worms, Luther refers to one of these warlike knights as follows: "What Hutten has in mind you can see [from the writings of the knight which he enclosed]. I would not like to see men fight for the Gospel with force and bloodshed. I have answered that parson (*dem Menschen*) accordingly. By the Word the world has been overcome, the Church has been preserved; by the Word it will also be restored. As to Antichrist, he began his rule without physical force, and will also be destroyed without physical force, by the Word." (15:2506.) The letter from which these words are quoted is dated January 16, 1522. Nine months before this date, on May 14, when he had been on the Wartburg about ten days, Luther writes to the same party:

"It is for good reasons that I have not answered your letter ere this: I hesitated from fear that the report recently gone out of my being held captive might prompt somebody to intercept my letters. A great many things are related about me at this place; however, the opinion is beginning to prevail that I was captured by friends sent for this purpose from Franconia. Tomorrow the safe-conduct granted me by the emperor expires. I am sorry that, as you write me, there is an intention to apply the very severe [imperial] edict also for the purpose of exploring men's consciences; not on my account, but because they [the papists] are ill-advised in this and will bring misfortune on their own heads, and because they continue to load themselves with very great odium. Oh, what hatred will this shameless violence kindle! However, they may have their way; perhaps the time of their visitation is near.

– So far I have not heard from our people either at Wittenberg or elsewhere. About the time of our arrival at Eisenach the young men [the students] at Erfurt had, during the night, damaged a few priests' dwellings, from indignation because the dean of St. Severus Institute, a great papist, had caught Magister Draco, a gentleman who is favorably inclined to us, by his cassock and had publicly dragged him from the choir, pretending that he had been excommunicated for having gone to meet me at my arrival at Erfurt. Meanwhile people are fearing greater disturbances; the magistrates are conniving, for the local priests are in ill repute, and it is being reported that the artisans are allying themselves with the student-body. The prophetic saying seems about to come true which runs: Erfurt is another Prague. [There was rioting in Prague in the days of Hus, whom Rome burned at the stake.]– I was told yesterday that a certain priest at Gotha has met with rough treatment because his people had bought certain estates (I do not know which), in order to increase the revenue of the church, and, under pretext of their ecclesiastical immunity, had refused to pay the incumbrances and taxes on the same. We see that the people, as also Erasmus writes, are unable and unwilling any longer to bear the yoke of the Pope and the papists. And still we do not cease coercing and burdening them, although — now that everything has been brought to light — we have lost our reputation and their good will, and our former halo of sanctity can no longer avail or exert the influence which it exerted formerly. Heretofore we have increased hatred by violence and by violence have suppressed it; however, whether we can continue suppressing it experience will show." (15, 2510.)

## To Melanchthon he wrote about this time:

"I hear that at Erfurt they are resorting to violence against the dwellings of priests. I am surprised that the city council permits this and connives at it, and that our dear friend Lang keeps silent. For although it is good that those impious men who will not desist are kept in check, still this procedure will bring the Gospel into disrepute, and will cause men justly to spurn it. I would write to Lang, but as yet I dare not. For such a display of friendliness to our cause as these people show is very offensive to me, because it clearly shows that we are not yet worthy servants in God's sight, and that Satan is mocking and laughing at our efforts [of reform]. Oh, how I do fear that all this is like the fig tree in the parable, of which the Lord, Matt. 21, predicts that it will merely sprout before the Day of Judgment, but will bear no fruit. What we teach is, indeed, the truth; however, it amounts to nothing if we do not practice what we preach." (15, 1906.)



Disquieting rumors of excesses that were being perpetrated by radical followers of the evangelical teaching had reached Luther also from Wittenberg. To obtain a clear insight into the actual state of affairs, he made a secret visit to his home town in the beginning of December, 1521. Returning to his exile, he wrote his *Faithful Admonition to All Christians to Avoid Tumult and Rebellion*. In this treatise Luther reasons as follows: The papacy, with all its great institutions, cloisters, universities, laws and doctrines, is nothing but lies. On lies it was raised, by lies it is supported, with lies and frauds and cheats it deceives, misleads, and oppresses men. Accordingly, all that is necessary to overthrow its dominion is to recognize its lying character, and to publish it and the papacy will collapse as if blown aside by the breath of the Almighty, as Scripture says it shall happen to Antichrist. To start a riot against the papists would never improve them, and would only cause them to vilify the cause of their opponents. In times of tumult, people lose their reason and do more harm to innocent people than to the guilty. Public wrongs should be redressed by the magistrates, who are vested with authority for that purpose. No matter how just a cause may be, it never justifies rioting. Luther declares that he will rather side with those who suffer in, than with those who start, a riot. Rioting is forbidden in God's Law (Deut. 16:20; 32, 35). This particular rioting against the papists has been instigated by the devil, in order to divert people's minds from the real spiritual issues of the times, and to bring the cause of the Gospel into disrepute. Luther feels these tumultuous proceedings as a disgrace.

"People who read and understand my teaching correctly," he says, "do not start riots. They were not taught such things by me. If any engage in such proceedings and drag my name into it, what can I do to stop them? How many things are the papists doing in the name of Christ which Christ never commanded!" Luther begs all who glory in the name of Christians to conduct themselves as Paul demands 2 Cor. 6:3: "Giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed." (10:360 ff.) Whoever can, ought to treat himself to the reading of this fine treatise of the exiled monk of Wittenberg.

The iconoclastic uprising which broke out in Wittenberg in the closing days of the month of February, 1522, finally decided Luther, at the risk of his life, to quit his exile and to fight the devil, who was trying to subvert his good doctrine by such wicked practices. The world knows that it was Luther who quelled the riot in his town. Luther's face was ever sternly set

against those who wanted to wage the Lord's wars with the devil's weapons. No murder or sacrilege that was committed in those days can be laid at the door of Luther's teaching.

The Catholics are trying to divert attention from their own unwarranted and violent proceedings by charging Luther with preaching a war of extermination against their hierarchy. How did they treat the just claims and reasonable demands of the German nation for measures that were admitted to be crying needs of the times? No German diet met but a long list of grievances was submitted by the suffering people. It was of no avail. The haughty clergy rode over the people's rights and prayers rough-shod. The tyrannous devices which their cunning had invented were executed with brazen impudence. How had they treated simple laymen in whose possession a Bible was found? What was their inquisitorial court but the anteroom to holy butchers' shambles, the legal vestibule to murder that had been sanctioned by the Popes? How had they treated Luther? If the papal nuncio at the Diet of Worms had had his way with the emperor and the princes, Luther would not have left that city alive. They openly declared to the emperor that he was not obliged to keep his plighted word for a safe-conduct to a heretic. These people come now at this late day prating about violence that they have suffered from this sacrilegious and bloodthirsty Luther. They themselves were the perpetrators of the most appalling violence against God and men: their whole system rests, as Johann Gerhard in his famous *Confessio Catholica* rightly asserts, on *Fraus et Vis*, that is, Fraud and Violence.

## 23. Luther, Anarchist and Despot All in One

EXTREMES MET, with most disastrous effect – so Catholic writers tell us – in Luther's views of the political rights of men. At one time he was so outspoken in his condemnation of the oppression which the common people were suffering from the clergy, the nobility, and their aristocratic governors that he incited them to discontent with their humble lot in life, to unrest, and to open rebellion against their magistrates. At another time he became the spokesman for the most pronounced absolutism and despotism. He turned suddenly against the very people whose cause he had so signally championed, and who hailed him as their prophet and leader. When the poor, downtrodden people needed him most, Luther cowardly deserted them, and by frenzied utterances excited the nobility to slay the common people without mercy in the most ruthless fashion, and even promised the lords whom he had denounced as tyrants heaven for enacting the barbaric cruelties to which he was urging them. This is the Catholic portrayal of Luther during the Peasants' War.

The relation of the peasant uprising to Luther's preaching is grossly misrepresented when the impression is created that Luther had before this sad upheaval worked hand in glove with the malcontent rustics for the overthrow of the government. Disturbances of this kind had been periodical occurrences in Europe for many hundreds of years. The heavy taxes and tithes, and the forced labor which the lords exacted from their tenants, who were little better than serfs, the galling restrictions in regard to hunting, fishing, gathering wood in the forests which they had imposed on them, the foreign Roman law under which they tried cases in court, and, in general, their haughty and contemptuous bearing toward the common people had for many generations created strained relations between the upper and the lower classes. The estrangement which developed into open defiance existed among the peasants before Luther had begun to preach. Nor can

Luther's teaching be said to have fanned the slumbering embers of discontent into a huge flame. The liberty of a Christian man which he had proclaimed was not such liberty as the peasants demanded and wrested to themselves when the revolt had reached its height. Luther had consistently taught that obedience to the government is a Christian duty. He had, as we have shown in the preceding chapter, warned with telling force against riot, tumult, and sedition. He had deprecated any allying of the cause of the Gospel and of spiritual freedom with the carnal strivings of disaffected men for mere temporal and secular advantages. He had reminded Christians that it was their duty to suffer wrong rather than do wrong.

On the other hand, Luther had pleaded the cause of the poor before the lords, and had earnestly warned the nobility not to continue their tyranny, but conciliate their subjects by yielding to their just demands. He had fearlessly pointed out to the lords what was galling in their conduct to the common people—their pride and luxurious living, their disregard of the commonest rights of man, their despotic dealings with their humble subjects, their rude behavior and exasperating conduct toward the men, women, and children whom they made toil and slave for them.

Maintaining, thus, an honest equipoise between the two contrary forces, and dealing out even-handed justice to both, Luther was conscious of serving the true interests of either side and laboring for the common welfare of all. With his implicit faith in the power of God's Word he was hoping for a gradual improvement of the situation. The conflict would be adjusted in a quiet and orderly manner by the truth obtaining greater and greater sway over the minds of men. Luther had had no inkling of an impending clash between the peasants and the nobility when the revolt broke out with the fury of a cyclone. Luther was shocked. He promptly hurried to the scene of the disturbances by request of the Count of Mansfeld. It speaks volumes for the integrity of Luther that both sides were willing to permit him to arbitrate their differences. The invitation came originally from the peasants and was addressed to Luther, Melancthon, Bugenhagen, and the Elector Frederick jointly, but it was not acted on until Count Albert invited Luther to come to Eisleben. The *Exhortation to Peace on the Twelve Articles of the Peasants* which Luther issued, after having investigated the situation, rebukes the lords with considerably more sternness than the commoners, but makes fair suggestions for the composition of the differences. Before Luther takes up the "Twelve Articles of the Peasants" for detailed discussion, he informs

them that he considers their whole procedure wrong, even if all their demands were just, because they have resorted to force to secure their right. A beautiful sentiment for an anarchist to utter, is it not? In Article I the peasants demanded freedom to elect their own pastors, who were to preach the Gospel without any human additions. That this request should be embodied in the peasants' plea for their political rights, and that it should be made the foremost demand, is highly suggestive as to the principal cause of their unrest. To this article Luther gave his unreserved endorsement. Article II sought to regulate the income of priests-again a very suggestive request: preachers were to receive for their sustenance no more than the tithes, the remainder of the church-income was to be set aside so as to render it unnecessary to tax the poor in war-times. On this point Luther held that the tithes belong to the government, and to turn them over to any one else would be simple robbery. Article III demanded the abolition of serfdom, however, as a test whether the Christianity of the lords was genuine. The peasants implied that their political liberty had been secured by Christ, and that the lords were withholding it from them. This argument Luther rejected as a carnal perversion of the Gospel. Articles IV-X submitted these demands: The poor man is to be accorded the right to fish and hunt; all wooded lands usurped by bishops or noblemen without making payment therefor are to revert to the community, and in case payment had been made, a settlement is to be effected by mutual agreement; burdensome exactions, services, taxes, and fines are to be rescinded; court trials are to be free from partiality and jealousy; meadows and lands which of right belong to the community are to be returned by their present owners. On these points Luther suggests that the opinions of good lawyers be obtained. Article XI deals with the right of heriot, or the death-tax imposed upon the widow or heir of a tenant. This was approved. In the last article the peasants express their readiness to withdraw any or all of these requests that are shown to be contrary to Scripture, and ask permission to substitute others for them.

Luther was in a fair way of bringing about an amicable settlement of the differences. Philip of Hesse had at the same time come to a full agreement with the peasants in his domains, and peace seemed near, when the real genius of the whole peasant movement, Muenzer, interfered. Luther had suspected for some time that this unscrupulous agitator was spreading the teaching of unbridled license under pretense of preaching liberty, and that

the mystical piety which he was reported as practicing, his leaning towards the reform movement, and his references to Luther and the “new Gospel,” were nothing but the angel’s garment which a very wicked devil had borrowed for purposes of deception. When Muenzer at the head of hordes of men who through his inflammatory speeches had been turned into unreasoning brutes was spreading ruin and desolation along his path, wiping out in a few days the products of the patient labors of generations, subverting the fundamental principles of honesty, justice, and morality on which the organized public life of the community and the private life of the individual must rest, and rapidly changing even the well-meaning and reasonable among the peasants into frenzied madmen, Luther recognized that conciliatory measures and arbitration would not avail with these mobs. His duty as a teacher of God’s Word and as a loyal subject of his government demanded prompt and stern action from him. However, back of the terrible mien with which Luther now faced the wild peasants there is a heart of love; in the appalling language which he now uses against men whose cause he had befriended there is discernible a note of pity for the poor deluded wretches who thought they were rearing a paradise when they were building bedlam. Above all, the great heart of Luther is torn with anguish over the shame that is now being heaped on the blessed Gospel of his dear Lord. Luther did not desert the peasants, but they deserted him; they were the traitors, not he.

There is a diabolical streak in the character of Thomas Muenzer. He parades as the People’s Man, and the German people in the sixteenth century never had a worse enemy. His fluent speech and great oratory seemed honey to the peasants, but they were the veriest poison. He spoke the language of a saint, and lived the life of a profligate and a reprobate. It is hard to believe that his error was merely the honest fanaticism of a blind bigot; there is a malign element in it that betrays conscious wickedness. This raving demon should be studied more by Catholics when they investigate the Peasants’ Revolt. They have their eyes on Luther; his every word and action are placed under the microscope. But the real culprit is treated as the hero in a tragedy. He was a blind enthusiast; he mistook his aims; he selected wrong means and methods for achieving his aim. He did wickedly, and we may have to curse him some for decency’s sake, but he deserves pity, too, for he was the misguided pupil of that arch-heretic Luther. That is Catholic equity in estimating Luther’s share in the peasant

uprising. We only note in conclusion that Thomas Muenzer died in the arms of the alone-saving Church, a penitent prodigal that had returned to the bosom of "Holy Mother." Luther did not die thus, and that makes a great deal of difference.

Catholics father upon Luther not only the Peasants' Revolt, but every revolutionary movement which since then has occurred in Europe. The political unrest which has at various times agitated the masses in France, England, and Germany, the changes in the government which were brought about in such times, are all attributed to the revolutionary tendencies in Luther's writings. So is the disrespect shown by citizens of the modern State to persons in authority, the bold and scathing criticism indulged in by subjects against their government. There is hardly a political disturbance anywhere but what ingenious Catholics will manage to connect with Luther. Read Luther, and you will inevitably become an anarchist.

But Luther is also credited with the very opposite of anarchism. When the Peasants' Revolt had been put down by the lords, they began to strengthen their despotic power over the people, and a worse tyranny resulted than had existed before. It is pointed out that absolutism, the claim of kings that they are ruling by divine right and are not responsible to the people, has taken firm root in all Protestant countries, and that even the Protestant churches in these countries are mere fixtures of the State. This, too, we are asked to believe, is a result of Luther's teaching. Luther is not only the spiritual ring-leader of mobs, but also the sycophant of despots. It is particularly offensive to Catholics to see Luther hailed as the champion of political liberty. Let us try and make up our minds about Luther's views of the secular government from Luther's own words. Dr. Waring, in his *Political Theories of Luther*, has made a very serviceable collection of statements of Luther on this matter.

"In his tract on Secular Authority (10:374 ff.) Luther maintains that the State exists by God's will and institution; for the Apostle Paul writes: 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation' (Rom. 13:1. 2). The Apostle Peter exhorts: 'Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do

well' (1 Pet. 2:13. 14). The right of the sword has existed since the beginning of the world. When Cain killed his brother Abel, he was so fearful of being put to death himself that God laid a special prohibition thereupon that no one should kill him, which fear he would not have had, had he not seen and heard from Adam that murderers should be put to death. Further, after the Flood, God repeated and confirmed it in explicit language, when He declared: 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed' (Gen. 9:6). This law was ratified later by the law of Moses: 'But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from Mine altar, that he may die' (Ex. 21:14); and yet again: 'Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe' (Ex. 21:23-25). Christ confirmed it also when He said to Peter in the garden: 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword' (Matt. 26:52). The words of Christ: 'But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil' (Matt. 5:38. 39), 'Love your enemies, ...do good to them that hate you' (Matt. 5:44), and similar passages, having great weight, might seem to indicate that Christians under the Gospel should not have a worldly sword; but the human race is to be divided into two classes, one belonging to the kingdom of God and the other to the kingdom of the world. To the first class belong all true believers in Christ and under Christ, for Christ is King and Lord in the kingdom of God (Ps. 2:6, and throughout the Scriptures). These people need no worldly sword or law, for they have the Holy Ghost in their hearts who suffer wrong gladly and themselves do wrong to no one. There is no need of quarrel or contention, of court or punishment. St. Paul says: 'The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners' (1 Tim. 1:9), for the righteous man of himself does everything that the law demands, and more; but the unrighteous do nothing right, and they therefore need the law to teach, constrain, and compel them to do right. A good tree requires no instruction or law that it may bring forth good fruit, but its nature causes it to bear fruit after its kind. Thus are all Christians so fashioned through the Spirit and faith that they do right naturally, more than man could teach them with all laws. All those who are not Christians in this particular sense belong to the kingdom of the world. Inasmuch as there are few who are true Christians in faith and life, God established, in addition to the kingdom of God, another rule-that of temporal power and civil government, and gave it the sword to



compel the wicked to be orderly. It is for this worldly estate that law is given. Christ rules without law, alone through the Spirit, but worldly government protects the peace with the sword. Likewise, true Christians, although not in need of it for themselves, nevertheless render cheerful obedience to this government, through love for the others who need it. A Christian himself may wield the sword when called upon to maintain peace among men and to punish wrong. This authority, which is God's handmaid, as St. Paul says, is as necessary and good as other worldly callings. God therefore instituted two regimens, or governments-the spiritual, which, through the Holy Ghost under Christ, makes Christians and pious people, and the worldly or temporal, which warns the non-Christians and the wicked that they must maintain external peace. We must clearly distinguish between these two powers and let them remain-the one that makes pious, the other that makes for external peace and protects against wickedness. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other; for without the spiritual estate of Christ no one can be good before God through the worldly estate. Where civil government alone rules, there would be hypocrisy, though its laws were like God's commandments themselves; for without the Holy Spirit in the heart none can be pious, whatever good works he may perform. Where the spiritual estate rules over land and people, there will be unbridled wickedness and opportunity for all kinds of villainy, for the common world cannot accept or understand it.-But it may be said, If, then, Christians do not need the temporal power or law, why does St. Paul say to all Christians: 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers' (Rom. 13:1)? In reply to this, it is to be said again that Christians among themselves and by and for themselves require no law or sword, for to them they are not necessary or useful. But because a true Christian on earth lives for and serves not himself, but his neighbor, so he also, from the nature of his spirit, does that which he himself does not need, but which is useful and necessary to his neighbor. The sword is a great and necessary utility to the whole world for the maintenance of peace, the punishment of wrong, and the restraint of the wicked. So the Christian pays tribute and tax, honors civil authority, serves, assists, and does everything he can do to maintain that authority with honor and fear." (p. 73 ff.)

In his *Appeal to the German Nobility* (10:266 ff.) Luther says:

“Forasmuch as the temporal power has been ordained by God for the punishment of the bad and the protection of the good, therefore we must let it do its duty throughout the whole Christian body, without respect of persons, whether it strike Popes, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, or whoever it may be. If it were sufficient reason for fettering the temporal power that it is inferior among the offices of Christianity to the offices of priest or confessor, to the spiritual estate,-if this were so, then we ought to restrain tailors, cobblers, masons, carpenters, cooks, cellarmen, peasants, and all secular workmen from providing the Pope or bishops, priests and monks, with shoes, clothes, houses, or victuals, or from paying them tithes. But if these laymen are allowed to do their work without restraint, what do the Romanist scribes mean by their laws? They mean that they withdraw themselves from the operation of temporal Christian power, simply in order that they may be free to do evil, and thus fulfill what St. Peter said: ‘There shall be false teachers among you, ...and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you’ (2 Pet. 2:1. 3). Therefore the temporal Christian power must exercise its office without let or hindrance, without considering whom it may strike, whether Pope or bishop, or priest. Whoever is guilty, let him suffer for it.-Whatever the ecclesiastical law has said in opposition to this is merely the invention of Romanist arrogance. For this is what St. Paul says to all Christians: ‘Let every soul’ (I presume, including the Popes) ‘be subject unto the higher powers... Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same, ...for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil’ (Rom. 13:1-4). Also St. Peter: ‘Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake; ...for so is the will of God’ (1 Pet. 2:13. 15). He has also foretold that men would come who would despise government (2 Pet. 2), as has come to pass through ecclesiastical law.-Although the work of the temporal power relates to the body, it yet belongs to the spiritual estate. Therefore it must do its duty without let or hindrance upon all members of the whole body, to punish or urge, as guilt may deserve, or need may require, without respect of Pope, bishops, or priests, let them threaten or excommunicate as they will. That is why a guilty priest is deprived of his priesthood before being given over to the secular arm; whereas this would not be right if the secular powers had not authority over him already by divine ordinance.-It is, indeed, past bearing that the spiritual law should esteem so highly the liberty, life, and property of the clergy, as if laymen were not as good spiritual Christians, or not equally members of the Church. Why should your body, life, goods, and honor be free, and not mine, seeing that we are equal as Christians, and have received alike baptism, faith, spirit, and all things? If a priest is killed, the country is laid under an interdict; why not also if a peasant is killed? Whence comes this great difference among equal Christians? Simply from human laws and inventions.” (p. 96 ff.)

This citation deserves to be specially pondered in view of the Catholic charge that Luther was a defender of absolutism, the divine right of kings. If Rome’s attitude to kingcraft be studied, it will be found that Rome has been the supporter of the most tyrannous rulers. It is well, too, to remember Rome’s claim of a “divine right” of priests. Special laws of exemption and immunity, laws creating special privileges for priests, are not unknown in the annals of the world’s history. Whoever can, ought to read the entire

*Appeal to the German Nobility*; it will tell him many things that explain the Peasants' Revolt.

In his *Severe Booklet against the Peasants* (16:71 ff.) Luther explains the reasons for the harsh language which he uses against the marauders. "He says that the maxims dealing with mercy belong to the kingdom of God and among Christians, not to the kingdom of the world, which is the instrument of godly wrath upon the wicked. The instrument in the hand of the State is not a garland of roses or a flower of love, but a naked sword. As I declared at the time, he says, so declare I yet: Let every one who can, as he may be able, cut, stab, choke, and strike the stiff-necked, obdurate, blind, infatuated peasants; that mercy may be shown towards those who are destroyed, driven away, and misled by the peasants; that peace and security may be had. It is better to mercilessly cut off one member rather than lose the entire body through fire or plague. Furthermore, the insurgents are notoriously faithless, perjured, disobedient, riotous thieves, robbers, murderers, and blasphemers, so that there is not one of them but has well deserved death ten times over without mercy. If my advice had been followed in the very beginning, and a few lives had been taken, before the insurrection assumed such large proportions, thousands of lives would have been saved. The experience should make all parties involved wise."

"If it be said," he continues, "that I myself teach lawlessness, when I urge all who can to cut down the rioters, my booklet was not written against common evil-doers, but against seditious rioters. There is a marked distinction between such a one and a murderer or robber and other ordinary criminals; for a murderer or similar criminal lets the head and civil authority itself stand, and attacks merely its members or its property. He, indeed, fears the government. Now, while the head remains, no individual should attack the murderer, because the head [civil authority] call punish him, but should wait for the judgment and sentence of that authority to which God has given the sword and office. But the rioter attacks the head itself, so that his offense bears no comparison with that of the murderer." (p. 147.)

Under the restriction under which this book was written as regards space, we cannot enter as we would like to upon an exhaustive discussion of Luther's political views. Luther was in this respect the most enlightened European citizen of his age. He has voiced sound principles on the rights of the State and its limitations and the objects for which the State exists and

does not exist, on the separation of Church and State, on the removal of bad rulers from authority, and especially on liberty. The power of the State he values because it secures to each individual citizen the highest degree of liberty possible in this life. Those who represent Luther as a defender of anarchy or tyranny either do not know what they are talking about, or they do it for a purpose, and deserve the contempt of all intelligent men.

## 24. Luther the Destroyer of Liberty of Conscience

CATHOLICS CLAIM that Luther's work, though ostensibly undertaken in behalf of religious liberty, necessarily had to result in the very opposite of freedom. They point to the fact that in most countries which accepted the Protestant faith the Church became subservient to the State. These state churches of Europe, however, which in the view of Catholics are the product of Luther's reform movement, are to be regarded as only one symptom of the intolerance which characterizes the entire activity of Luther. He had indeed adopted the principle of "private interpretation" of the Scriptures, however, only for himself. He was unwilling to accord to others the right which he claimed for himself. All who dissented from his teaching were promptly attacked by him, and that, in violent and scurrilous language. The Protestant party in the course of time became a warring camp of Ishmaelites, Luther fighting everybody and everybody fighting Luther. Religious intolerance and persecution became the prevailing policy of Protestants in their dealings with other Protestants. The burning of Servetus at Geneva by Calvin was the logical outcome of Luther's teaching. The maxim, *Cuius regio, eius religio*, that is, The prince, or government, in whose territory I reside determines my religion, became a Protestant tenet. America got its first taste of religious liberty, not from the original Protestant settlers, but from the Catholic colonists whom Lord Baltimore brought to Maryland, etc., etc.

The view here propounded is in plain contravention of what the world has hitherto believed, and to a very large extent still believes, regarding Luther's attitude toward the right of the individual to choose his own religion and to determine for himself matters of faith. The position which Luther occupies in his final answer before the Emperor at Worms is generally believed to state Luther's position on the question of religious liberty in a nutshell. "Unless convinced by the Word of God or by cogent

reason” that he was wrong, he declared at the Diet of Worms, he could not and would not retract what he had written. The individual conscience, he maintained, cannot be bound. Each man must determine the meaning of the Word for himself. And the inevitable result of this principle is individual liberty. This principle Luther maintained to the end of his life. His appeal to the magistrates to suppress the Peasants’ Revolt was not a call to suppress the false teachings of the peasants, but their disorderly conduct. Against their spiritual aberrations Luther proposed to wage war with his written and oral testimony. “The peace and order of the State must be maintained against disorder, personal violence, destruction of property, public immorality, and treason, though they come in the guise of religion. The State must grant liberty of conscience, freedom of speech, and the privilege of the press. These are inalienable rights belonging alike to every individual, subject only to the limitation that they are not permitted to encroach upon the rights of others. The natural, the almost inevitable, consequence of the declaration and recognition of these principles was eventually the establishment of modern constitutional law. It was not in consequence of his teaching, but merely in spite of it, that for the next two centuries (in certain instances) monarchical government became more autocratic, as feudalism was being transformed into civil government... All through Luther’s writings, and in his own acts as well, is to be read the right of the individual to think and believe in matters political, religious, and otherwise as he sees proper. His is the right to read the Bible, and any other book he may desire. He has the right to confer and counsel, with others, to express and declare his views *pro* and *con*, in speech and print, so long as he abides by, and remains within, the laws of the land. Luther firmly believed in the liberty of the individual as to conscience, speech, and press. The search for truth must be untrammelled.” (Waring, *Political Theories of Luther*, p. 235 f.)

This testimony of one who has made a careful investigation of Luther’s writings on the subject of liberty of conscience is, of course, not first-hand evidence; it merely shows what impressions people take away from their study of Luther. Let us hear Luther himself. In the *Appeal to the German Nobility* he says: “No one can deny that it is breaking God’s commandments to violate faith and a safe-conduct, even though it be promised to the devil himself, much more than in the case of a heretic... Even though John Hus were a heretic, however bad he may have been, yet

he was burned unjustly and in violation of God's commandments, and we must not force the Bohemians to approve this, if we wish ever to be at one with them. Plain truth must unite us, not obstinacy. It is no use to say, as they said at the time, that a safe-conduct need not be kept if promised to a heretic; that is as much as to say, one may break God's commandments in order to keep God's commandments. They were infatuated and blinded by the devil, that they could not see what they said or did. God has commanded us to observe a safe-conduct; and this we must do though the world should perish; much more, then, where it is only a question of a heretic being set free. We should overcome heretics with books, not with fire, as the old Fathers did. If there were any skill in overcoming heretics with fire, the executioner would be the most learned doctor in the world; and there would be no need of study, but he that could get another into his power could burn him." (10, 332.)

In his treatise *On the Limits of Secular Authority*, Luther says:

"Unbearable loss follows where the secular authority is given too much room, and it is likewise not without loss where it is too restricted. Here it punishes too little; there it punishes too much. Although it is more desirable that it offend on the side of punishing too little than that it punish too severely; because it is always better to permit a knave to live than to put a good man to death, inasmuch as the world still has and must have knaves, but has few good men.

"In the first place, it is to be noted that the two classes of the human race, one of whom is in the kingdom of God under Christ, and the other in the kingdom of the world under civil authority, have two kinds of laws; for every kingdom must have its laws and its rights, and no kingdom or *regime* can stand without law, as daily experience shows. Temporal government has laws that do not reach farther than over person and property, and what is external on the earth; for God will not permit any one to rule over the soul of man but Himself. Therefore, where temporal power presumes to give laws to the soul, it touches God's rule, and misleads and destroys the souls. We wish to make that so clear that men may comprehend it, in order that our knights, the princes and bishops, may see what fools they are when seeking to force people by their laws and commandments to believe thus or so. When a man lays a human law or commandment upon the soul, that it must believe this or that, as the man prescribes, it is assuredly not God's Word... Therefore it is a thoroughly foolish thing to command a man to believe the Church, the Fathers, the councils, although there is nothing on it from God's Word.

"Now tell me, how much sense does the head have that lays down a command on a matter where it has no authority? Who would not hold as of unsound mind the person who would command the moon to shine when it wishes? How fitting would it be if the Leipzig authorities would lay down laws for us at Wittenberg, or we at Wittenberg for the people of Leipzig? Moreover, let men thereby understand that every authority should and may concern itself only where it can see, know, judge, sentence, transform, and change; for what kind of judge is he to me who would blindly judge matters he neither hears nor sees? Now tell me, how can a man see, know, judge, sentence, and change the heart? For that is reserved to God alone. A court should and must be certain when it sentences, and have everything in clear light. But the soul's thoughts and impulses can be known to no one but God. Therefore it is futile and impossible to command or compel a man by force to believe thus or so. For that purpose another grip is necessary. Force does not accomplish it. For my ungracious lords, Pope and bishops, should be bishops and preach God's Word; but they leave that and have become temporal princes and rule with laws that concern only person and property. They have reversed the order of things. Instead of ruling souls (internally) through God's Word, they rule (externally) castles, cities, lands, and people, and kill souls with indescribable murder. The temporal lords should, in like manner, rule (externally) land and people; but they leave that. They can do nothing more than flay and shave the people, set one tax and one rent on another; there let loose a bear and here a wolf; respect no right, or faith, or truth, and conduct affairs so that robbers and knaves increase in number; and their temporal *regime* lies as far beneath as the *regime* of the spiritual tyrants. Faith is a matter concerning which each one is responsible for himself; for as little as one man can go to heaven or hell for me, so little can he believe or not believe for me; and as little as he can open or close heaven or hell for me, so little can he drive me to belief or unbelief. We have the saying from St. Augustine: 'No one can or should be compelled to believe.' The blind and miserable people do not see what a vain and impossible thing they undertake; for, however imperiously they command, and however hard they drive, they cannot force people any farther than they follow with their mouth and the hand. They cannot compel the heart, though they should break it. For true is the maxim: *Gedanken sind zollfrei*. (No toll is levied on thought.) When weak consciences are driven by force to lie, deceive, and say



otherwise than they believe in the heart, they burden themselves also with a heavy sin; for all the lies and false witness given by such weak consciences rest upon him who forces them.

"Christ Himself clearly recognized and concisely stated this truth when He said: 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's' (Matt. 22:21). Now, when imperial authority stretches itself over into God's kingdom and authority and does not keep within its own separate jurisdiction, this discrimination between the two realms has not been made. For the soul is not under authority of the emperor. He can neither teach nor guide it, neither kill it nor give it life, neither bind nor loose, neither judge nor sentence, neither hold nor let alone; which necessarily would exist had he authority so to do, for they are under his jurisdiction and power.

"David long ago expressed it briefly: 'The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth hath He given to the children of men' (Ps. 115:16). That is to say, over what is on the earth and belongs to the temporal earthly kingdom, man has power from God; but what belongs to heaven and to the eternal kingdom is under the Lord of heaven alone. But finally, this is the meaning of Peter: 'We ought to obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). He here clearly marks a limit to temporal authority; for were men obliged to observe everything that civil authority wished, the command, 'We ought to obey God rather than men,' would have been given in vain.

"If, now, your princes or temporal lord command you to believe this or that, or to dispense with certain books, say: 'I am under obligations to obey you with body and estate; command me within the compass of your authority on earth, and I will obey you. Put if you command me as to belief, and order me to put away books, I will not obey, for then you become a tyrant and overreach yourself, and command where you have neither right nor power.' If your goods are taken and your disobedience is punished, you are blessed, and you may thank God that you are worthy to suffer for God's Word. When a prince is in the wrong, his subjects are not under obligations to follow him, for no one is obliged to do anything against the right; but we must obey God, who desires to have the right rather than men.

"But thou sayest once more: 'Yea, worldly power cannot compel to belief. It is only external protection against the people being misled by false doctrine. How else can heretics be kept in bay?' Answer: That is the business of bishops, to whom the office is entrusted, and not to princes. For heresy can never be kept off by force; another grip is wanted for that. This is another quarrel and conflict than that of the sword. God's Word must contend here. If that avail nothing, temporal power will never settle the matter, though it fill the world with blood. Heresy pertains to the spiritual world. You cannot cut it with iron, nor burn it with fire, nor drown it in water. You cannot drive the devil out of the heart by destroying, with sword or fire, the vessel in which he lives. This is like fighting a blade of straw." (10:395 ff.)

## Referring to the Anabaptists, Luther wrote in 1528:

"It is not right, and I think it a great pity, that such wretched people should be so miserably slain, burned, cruelly put to death; every one should be allowed to believe what he will. If he believe wrongly, he will have punishment enough in the eternal fire of hell. Why should he be tortured in this life, too; provided always that it be a case of mistaken belief only, and that they are not also unruly and oppose themselves to the temporal power?" (17:2188.)

To his friend Cresser he wrote:

“If the courts wish to govern the churches in their own interests, God will withdraw His benediction from them, and things will become worse than before. Satan still is Satan. Under the Popes he made the Church meddle in politics; in our time he wishes to make politics meddle with the Church.” (21b, 2911. Translations by Waring.)

But why did not these excellent principles attain better results in Luther’s own time? On this question we have no better answer than that given by Bryce: “The remark must not be omitted in passing how much less than might have been expected the religious movement did at first actually effect in the way of promoting either political progress or freedom of conscience. The habits of centuries were not to be unlearned in a few years, and it was natural that ideas struggling into existence and activity should work erringly and imperfectly for a time.” (*Holy Roman Empire*, p. 381.) This would be Luther’s own answer. His work was among people who were just emerging from the ignorance and spiritual bondage in which they had been reared in the Catholic Church. They had to be gradually and with much patience taught, not only in regard to their rights and privileges, but also in regard to their proper and most efficient application. But it is not in agreement with the facts when the charge is directed against Luther that he employed the authority of the State for furthering the ends of the Church because he urged the Saxon Elector to arrange for a visitation of the demoralized churches in the country, and to order such improvements to be made as would be found necessary (Erlangen Ed. 55, 223); also when he sought the Elector’s aid for the reform party at Naumburg at the election of a new bishop (17, 113). In both instances he speaks of the Elector as a “*Notbischof*,” that is, an emergency bishop. But his remarks must be carefully studied to get his exact meaning. For he declares that the Elector as a magistrate is under no obligation to attend to these matters. They are not state business. But he is asked as a Christian to place himself at the head of a laudable and necessary movement, and to place his influence and ability at the disposition of the Master, just as a Christian laborer, craftsman, merchant, musician, painter, poet, author, consecrate their abilities to the Lord. This means that the “emergency bishop” has not the right to issue commands in the Church, but he has the privilege and duty to serve. The people needed a leader, and who was better qualified for that than their trusted prince? Besides, the churches had to be protected in their secular and civil interests in those days. The

young Protestant faith would have been mercilessly extirpated by Rome, which was gathering the secular powers around her to fight her battles with material weapons against Protestants. The Protestant princes would have betrayed a trust which citizens rightly repose in their government, if they had not taken steps to afford the Protestant churches in their domains every legal protection. The protection of citizens in the exercise of their religious liberty is within the sphere of the civil magistrates. The citizens can appeal to the government for such protection, and when the government in the interest of religious liberty represses elements that are hostile, it is not intolerant, but just. If a religion, like that of the bomb-throwing anarchists and the vice-breeding Mormons, is forbidden to practice its faith in the land, that is not intolerance, but common equity.

One of the most pathetic spectacles which the student of medieval history has to contemplate is the treatment of the Jews at the hands of the Christians. "Few were the monarchs of Christendom," says Prof. Worman, "who rose above the barbarism of the Middle Ages. By considerable pecuniary sacrifices only could the sons of Israel enjoy tolerance. In Italy their lot had always been most severe. Now and then a Roman pontiff would afford them his protection, but, as a rule, they have received only intolerance in that country. Down even to the time of the deposition of Pius IX from the temporal power (1810) it has been the barbarous custom, on the last Saturday before the Carnival, to compel the Jews to proceed *en masse* to the capitol, and ask permission of the pontiff to reside in the city another year. At the foot of the hill the petition was refused them, but, after much entreaty, they were granted the favor when they had reached the summit, and as their residence the Ghetto was assigned them." In France a prelate condemned the Jews because the "country people looked upon them as the only people of God," whereupon "all joined in a carnival of persecution, and the history of the Jews became nothing else than a successive series of massacres." In Spain the Jews were treated more kindly by the Moors than by the Catholics. At first their services were valued in the crafts and trades, "but the extravagance and consequent poverty of the nobles, as well as the increasing power of the priesthood, ultimately brought about a disastrous change. The estates of the nobles and, it is also believed, those attached to the cathedrals and churches, were in many cases mortgaged to the Jews; hence it was not difficult for 'conscience' to get up a persecution when goaded to its 'duty' by the pressure of want and shame. Gradually the Jews

were deprived of the privilege of living where they pleased; their rights were diminished and their taxes augmented.”

To their lowest stage of misery, however, the Jews were reduced during one of the most holy enterprises which the papacy launched during the Middle Ages — the Crusades. “The crusading movement was inaugurated by a wholesale massacre and persecution first of the Jew, and afterwards of the Mussulman [Muslim] . . . Shut out from all opportunity for the development of their better qualities, the Jews were gradually reduced to a decline both in character and condition. From a learned, influential, and powerful class of the community, we find them, after the inauguration of the Crusades, sinking into miserable outcasts; the common prey of clergy and nobles and burghers, and existing in a state worse than slavery itself. The Christians deprived the Jews even of the right of holding real estate; and confined them to the narrower channels of traffic. Their ambition being thus fixed upon one subject, they soon mastered all the degrading arts of accumulating gain; and prohibited from investing their gain in the purchase of land, they found a more profitable employment of it in lending it at usurious interest to the thoughtless and extravagant.” In course of time the borrowers recouped their losses by inaugurating raids upon the Jews. Jew-baiting, persecutions, expatriations of Jewish settlers, were of frequent occurrence. Towards the end of the thirteenth century 16,000 Jews were expelled from England and their property confiscated. In Germany “they had to pay all manner of iniquitous taxes — body tax, capitation tax, trade taxes, coronation tax, and to present a multitude of gifts, to mollify the avarice or supply the necessities of emperor, princes, and barons. It did not suffice, however, to save them from the loss of their property. The populace and the lower clergy also must be satisfied; they, too, had passions to gratify. A wholesale slaughter of the ‘enemies of Christianity’ was inaugurated. Treves, Metz, Cologne, Mentz, Worms, Spire, Strassburg, and other cities were deluged with the blood of the ‘unbelievers.’ The word *Hep* (said to be the initials of *Hierosolyma est perdita*, Jerusalem is taken) throughout all the cities of the empire became the signal for massacres, and if an insensate monk sounded it along the streets, it threw the rabble into paroxysms of murderous rage. The choice of death or conversion was given to the Jews; but few were found willing to purchase their life by that form of perjury. Rather than subject their offspring to conversion and such Christian training, fathers presented their breast to the sword after putting their

children to death, and wives and virgins sought refuge from the brutality of the soldiers by throwing themselves into the river with stones fastened to their bodies.” (*McClintock and Strong Cyclop.*, 4, 908 f.)

All this happened under the most Christian rule of the Popes. The characteristic temper of the Jew in the Middle Ages, his fierce hatred of Christianity, his sullen mood, his blasphemous treatment of matters and objects sacred to Christians, are the result of the treatment he received even from the members and high officials of the Church. Now here comes Rome in our day asserting the kindness and generosity shown the Jews by their Popes, because these afforded them shelter in the Ghetto of the Holy City! How differently, they say, was this from the treatment accorded the Jews by Luther. Why, these Catholic writers do not tell the hundredth part of the truth about the attitude of their Church to the Jews in the Middle Ages.

Let this be remembered when Luther’s remarks about the Jews are taken up for study. He is very outspoken against them; his utterances, however, relate for the most part to the false teaching and religious practices, to their perversion of the text and the meaning of the Scriptures, and to the blasphemies which they utter against God, Jesus Christ, and His Church, and to the lies which they assiduously spread about the Christian religion. In all that Luther says against the Jews under this head he is simply discharging the functions of a teacher of Christianity; for Scripture says that it was given also “for reproof” (2 Tim. 3:16). No one can be a true theologian without being polemical on occasion. In another class of his references to the Jews Luther refers to their character: their arrogance and pride, their stiff-neckedness and contumacy, their greed and avarice, which makes their presence in any land a public calamity. Though their church and state has long been overthrown, and they are a people without a country, homeless wanderers on the face of the earth, they still boast of being “the people of God,” and are indulging the wildest dreams about the reestablishment of their ancient kingdom. They are looking for a Messiah who will be a secular prince, and will make them all barons living in beautiful castles and receiving the tribute of the Goyim. One may reason and plead with them and show them that their belief contradicts their own Scriptures, that their Talmud is filled with palpable falsehoods, and that their hope is a chimera; but they turn a deaf ear to argument and entreaty, and turn upon you with fierce resentment at your efforts to show them the truth. Although they know that their habits of grasping and hoarding wealth,

driving hard and unfair bargains, their hunting for small profits by contemptible methods like hungry dogs searching the offal in the alley, rouses the enmity of communities against them and causes them to become a blight to all true progress, to honest trade and business in any land where they have become firmly established, so that laws must be made against them, still they blindly and passionately continue their covetous strivings. When Luther observes the corrupting influence of the Jews on the public life and morals, he declares that they ought to be expelled from the country, and their synagogues ought to be destroyed, that is, they have deserved this treatment. But it is a remarkable fact that even in these terrible denunciations of the Jews Luther moves on Bible ground, as any one can see that will examine his exposition of an imprecatory psalm, like Psalm 109 and 59. If these words of God mean anything and admit of any application to an apostate and hardened race, the Jews are that race, and a teacher of the Bible has the duty to point out this fact. But Luther has not been a Jew-baiter; he has not incited a riot against them, nor headed a raid upon them, as Prof. Worman tells us that Catholic priests in the Middle Ages occasionally would do. What Luther thought of persecuting the Jews for their religion can be seen from his exposition of Psalm 14. He did not believe in a general conversion of the Jews, but he held that individual Jews would ever and anon be won for Christ and would be grafted on the olive-tree of the true Church. "Therefore," he says, "we ought to condemn the rage of some Christians — if they really deserve to be called Christians — who think that they are doing God a service by persecuting the Jews in the most hateful manner, imagining all manner of evil about them, proudly and haughtily mocking them in their pitiful misery. According to the statement in this Psalm (Ps. 14:7) and the example of the Apostle Paul in Rom. 9:1, we ought rather to feel a profound and cordial pity for them and always pray for them... By their tyrannical bearing these wicked people, who are nominally Christians, cause not a little injury, not only to the cause of Christianity, but also to Christian people, and they are responsible for, and sharers in, the impiety of the Jews, because by their cruel bearing toward them they drive them away from the Christian faith instead of attracting them with all possible gentleness, patience, pleading, and anxious concern for them. There are even some theologians so unreasonable as to sanction such cruelty to the Jews and to encourage people to it; in their proud conceit they assert that the Jews are the Christians' slaves and tributary to the

emperor, while in truth they are themselves Christians with as much right as any one nowadays is Roman Emperor. Good God, who would want to join our religion, even though he were of a meek and submissive mind, when he sees how spitefully and cruelly he is treated; and that the treatment he can expect is not only unchristian, but worse than bestial? If hating Jews and heretics and Turks makes people Christians, we insane people would indeed be the best Christians. But if loving Christ makes Christians, we are beyond a doubt worse than Jews, heretics, and Turks, because no one loves Christ less than we. The rage of these people reminds me of children and fools, who, when they see a picture of a Jew on a wall, go and cut out his eyes, pretending that they want to help the Lord Christ. Most of the preachers during Lent treat of nothing else than the cruelty of the Jews towards the Lord Christ, which they are continually magnifying. Thus they embitter believers against them, while the Gospel aims only at showing and exalting the love of God and Christ.” (4, 927.)

The Catholic claim that the Maryland Colony in the days of the Calverts became the first home of true religious liberty on American soil has been so often blasted by historians that one is loath to enter upon this moth-eaten claim for fear of merely repeating what others have more exhaustively stated. Catholics seem to forget what Bishop Perry has called attention to: “The Maryland charter of toleration was the gift of an English monarch, the nominal head of Church of England, and the credit of any merit in this donative is due the giver, and not the recipient, of the kingly grant.” Prof. Fisher has called attention to another fact: “Only two references to religion are to be found in the Maryland charter. The first gives to the proprietary patronage and advowson of churches. The second empowers him to erect churches, chapels, and oratories, which he may cause to be consecrated according to the ecclesiastical laws of England. The phraseology is copied from the Avalon patent (drawn up in England in 1623 for a portion of the colony of Newfoundland) that was given to Sir George Calvert (first Lord Baltimore) when he was a member of the Church of England. Yet the terms were such that recognition of that Church as the established form of religion does not prevent the proprietary and the colony from the exercise of full toleration toward other Christian bodies.” (*Colonial Era*, p. 64.) The Maryland Colony was admittedly organized as a business venture, and its original members were largely Protestants. It was to secure the financial interests of the proprietary that tolerance was shown

the colonists. Prof. Fisher says: "Any attempt to proscribe Protestants would have proved speedily fatal to the existence of the colony. In a document which emanated partly from Baltimore himself, it is declared to be evident that the distinctive privileges 'usually granted to ecclesiastics of the Roman Catholic Church by Catholic princes in their own countries could not be possibly granted here (in Maryland) without great offense to the King and State of England.'" (p. 63.) We have not the space in this review of Catholic charges and claims to go into the religious history of the Maryland Colony as we should like to do; otherwise we should explain the machinations of the Jesuits in this colony, and prove that what tolerance Maryland in its early days enjoyed it owed to the preponderating influence of non-Catholic forces.

It requires an unusual amount of courage for a Catholic writer at this late day to parade his Church as the mother and protectress of religious liberty and tolerance. Any person who has but a smattering knowledge of the history of the world during the last four centuries will smile at this claim. The old Rome of the days of the Inquisition and the *auto da fes* may seem tolerant in our days, but she is so from sheer necessity, not from any voluntary and joyous choice of her own. Her intolerant principles remain the same, only she has not the power to carry them into effect.

One of the Catholic bishops who was opposed to the dogma of papal infallibility, Reinkens, published a book bearing the remarkable title *Revolution and Church*. In this book a thought is suggested which connects the Roman Curia with political disturbances that occur in the world. The author regards the declaration of papal infallibility as another step forward in the imperialistic program of the Curia looking towards world-dominion. He argues that it is in the interest of the Vatican policies to foment trouble and breed revolutions in the commonwealths of the world. "The thoughts of the Roman Curia," he says, "are not the thoughts of God. Inasmuch, however, as it is these latter that are realized with increasing force in the history of the world, and that animate the formation of every true civil and ecclesiastical institution, the Curia is gradually forced into a conflict with the whole world... The Curia (to carry its aims into effect) tries one last means: its last attempt is to bring about a revolution. As 'the Church' succeeded in digging her charter out of the ruins of the commonwealths of the ancient world, so the spirits of Vaticanism hope again to rebuild the palace of their dominion out of ruins." (p. 4.) Again: "Bishop Hefele



entertains the fear that the recent elevation of the Pope to power (the infallibility dogma) will soon become the primary dogma in the instruction of children. We regret to say that this fear has proven well founded: all the governments, even the German, aid in this instruction of the schoolchildren, because they retain religious instruction on a confessional basis [we in America say on "sectarian" lines], hence also that prescribed by the Vatican, as obligatory, and the infallibilist clergy is salaried by the State for providing this instruction. The divine authority of the Pope extending over all men tends to disturb the minds of the children in the schools: they are taught at an early age to obey the Viceregent of God in preference to obeying the Emperor and the State. In the higher schools this is done by the clergy that is commissioned to teach in such schools." (p. 7.) Again: "The Roman order of the Jesuits is not only spread like a net over all countries, but it sinks its roots into every age, sex, estate, and loosens and forces apart the ligaments of civil institutions." (p. 8.)

Luther's views on human free will are brought forward once more to show that his teaching necessarily is hostile to liberty. Luther's famous reply to Erasmus *On the Bondage of the Will* is made to do yeoman's service in this respect. What Luther has declared regarding the sovereignty of God's rulership over men, regarding the relation of God also to the evil existing in this world, regarding the absence of chance in the affairs of men, regarding man's utter helplessness over and against the supreme will of God, is cited to prove that Luther's teaching leads, not to liberty, but either to recklessness or despair. Luther's views on "the captive, or enslaved, will" are declared to be the most degrading and demoralizing teaching that men have been offered during the last centuries. Luther's famous illustration, *viz.*, that man is like a horse which either God or the devil rides, has prompted the following remarks of one of Luther's most recent critics: "This parable summarizes the whole of Luther's teaching on the vital and all-important subject of man's free will... All who are honest and fearless of consequences must admit in frankest terms that Luther's teaching on free will, as expounded in his book, and explicitly making God the author of man's evil thoughts and deeds, cannot but lend a mighty force to the passions and justify the grossest violations of the moral law. Indeed, the enemy of souls, as Anderson remarks, 'could not inspire a doctrine more likely to effect his wicked designs than Luther's teaching oil the enslavement of the human will.'" There is a dogmatic reason for this

excoriation of Luther: Rome's teaching of righteousness by works and human merit. The same author says, in immediate connection with the foregoing: "Likening man to a 'beast of burden,' does Luther not maintain that man is utterly powerless 'by reason of his fallen nature' to lead a godly life, and merit by the practice of virtue the rewards of eternal happiness? Does he not say:

“It is written in the hearts of men that there is no freedom of will,’ that ‘all takes place in accordance with inexorable necessity,’ and that, even ‘were free will offered him, he should not care to have it’? But does not all this contradict the Spirit of God when, speaking in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, He says: ‘Before man is life and death, good and evil; that which he shall choose shall be given him’?”

We submitted in chap. 15 the Scriptural evidence on the spiritual disability of man. (The passage from Ecclesiasticus in the last quotation is not Scripture.) It is useless to argue with a person who refuses to accept this teaching of Scripture. We can only repeat what we said before: Let the advocates of human free will proceed to do what they claim they are able to do, and do it thoroughly. No one will begrudge them the crown of glory when they obtain it. On the other hand, they will have none but themselves to blame if they do not obtain it. In the light of God's holy Word, in the light, moreover, of the experience of the most spiritual-minded and saintly men that have lived on earth, we see in the claim of the advocates of human free will regarding the fulfillment of God's Law nothing but a vain boast, and a most mischievous attempt to be smarter than God. The theory of salvation by merit is the most disastrous risk that the human heart can take. Christ has mercifully warned men not to take this risk. If they will not hear Him, they will have to perish in their sins (John 8:24).

In chap. 15 we also explained Luther's views on human free will in the affairs of this life. We only have to add a word on the subject of contingency. Are Luther's Catholic, critics really so blind as not to see that man even in his ordinary affairs of common every-day life is subject to the inscrutable government of God? Our physical life in its most trivial aspects is entirely dependent not only on the laws of nature, which are nothing but the order which the Creator has appointed for the created universe, but also on extraordinary acts of God over which no man has control. The farmer sows his wheat and expects to reap a crop. How? By reason of the power of germination which the Creator has put in the grain, and the laws which

govern atmospheric changes, which laws, again, the Creator governs. The farmer can do nothing to make the wheat grow and ripen. He is utterly dependent upon God.— A merchant decides that he will make a business trip to New York. He will leave the next morning on the nine o'clock train. He orders his transportation, and the next morning—he does not leave. “Something happened; I had to change my plans,” he tells his friends. Ah, says our Catholic critic, but was he not free to change his mind? We say: You may talk as much as you wish about the person's freedom; the fact remains that the person would not have changed his mind unless he had to. - Let us follow this merchant a little further: He actually starts on his trip two days later. He is to arrive at his destination at two o'clock in the afternoon of the next day, and very much depends on his arriving just at that time. But he does not even get to Cincinnati. “Something happened,” he wires to his friend. And now his human free will goes into operation again: he changes his mind. - “Man proposes, but God disposes,” this belief is ineradicably written into the consciousness of all intelligent men, even of intelligent pagans, and no philosophy of free will will wipe it out. The wise farmer, after he has finished sowing his field, says, “God willing, I shall reap a good crop.” The wise merchant says, “God willing, I shall be in New York tomorrow.” And God approves of this wise reservation which causes the prudent to submit their most ordinary actions to divine revision. He says in Jas. 4:13-16: “Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain, whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.” Let Luther's Catholic critics wrestle with these and similar texts of Scripture, with these and similar facts of daily life. Luther has rightly declared the sovereignty of God a mighty ax and thunderbolt that shatters the assertion of human free will.

We have shown that Luther is no fatalist. His warning, on the one hand, not to disregard the secret will of God, and on the other, not to seek to find it out, is a masterpiece of wisdom. In view of the absolute sovereignty of God and man's absolute dependence upon it, Luther urges man to go to work in his chosen occupation in childlike reliance upon God. He is to employ to the utmost capacity all his God-given energies of mind and body

and work as if everything depended on his industry, strength, prudence, thrift, planning, and arranging. Having done all, he is to say: Dear Lord, it is all subject to Thy approval. Thou art Master; do Thou boss my business. If Thou overrulest my plans, I have nothing to say; Thou knowest better. Not my will, but Thine, be done.

This is the whole truth in a nutshell that Luther drives home in that part of his reply to Erasmus which treats of contingency. If ever statements garbled from the context are unfair to the author, what the Catholics are constantly doing in quoting Luther on the Bondage of the Will is one of the most glaring exhibitions of unfairness on record. This treatise of Luther deserves to be studied thoroughly and repeatedly, and measured against the facts of the common experience of all men. For a profitable study of this treatise there is, moreover, required a very humble mind, a mind that knows its sin, and is sincere in acknowledging its insufficiency.

The generation of Luther and the generations after him have had this particular teaching of Luther before them four hundred years. What effect has it had on human progress in every field of secular activity in Protestant lands? Has it created that chaos and confusion which Catholics claim it must inevitably lead to? Quite the contrary has happened. And now let the patrons of the theory of human free will measure their own success as recorded by history against that of Protestants.

## 25. “The Adam and Eve of the New Gospel of Concubinage.”

THIS IS THE HONORARY TITLE which Catholics bestow upon Martin Luther and Catherine von Bora, who were married June 13:1525, during the Peasants' War. Luther was forty-two years old at the time and his bride past twenty-six. She had left the cloister two years before her marriage, and had found employment during that time in the home of one of the citizens of Wittenberg. Their first child, Hans, was born June 7, 1526.

The grounds on which Catholics object to this marriage are, chiefly, three. In the first place, they declare the marriage the outcome of an impure relation which had existed between Luther and Catherine prior to their marriage. The marriage had virtually become a matter of necessity, to prevent greater scandal. Moreover, in this impure relationship Luther with his lascivious and lustful mind, in which fleshly desires were continually raging, had been the prime mover. The second ground on which Catholics object to Luther's marriage is, because Luther held professedly low views of the virtue of chastity and the state of matrimony. He had stripped matrimony of its sacramental character, and regarded it as a mere physical necessity and a social and civil contract. Thirdly, Catholics criticize Luther's marriage because it was entered into by both the contracting parties in violation of a sacred vow: Luther had been a monk and Catherine a nun, both sworn to perpetual celibacy.

Moral cleanness is indelibly stamped upon hundreds of pages of Luther's writings. The Sixth Commandment in its wider application to the mutual relation of the sexes and the sexual condition of the individual was to Luther the solemn voice of God by which the holy and wise Creator guards and protects the fountains whence springs human life. “Because there is among us,” he says, “such a shameful mixture and the very dregs of all kinds of vice and lewdness, this commandment is also directed against all manner of impurity, whatever it may be called; and not only is the

external act forbidden, but every kind of cause, incitement, and means, so that the heart, the lips, and the whole body may be chaste and afford no opportunity, help, or persuasion for impurity. And not only this, but that we may also defend, protect, and rescue wherever there is danger and need; and give help and counsel, so as to maintain our neighbor's honor. For wherever you allow such a thing when you could prevent it, or connive at it as if it did not concern you, you are as truly guilty as the one perpetrating the deed. Thus it is required, in short, that every one both live chastely himself and help his neighbor do the same." (*Large Catechism*, p. 419.) The reason why God in the Sixth Commandment refers to only one form of sexual impurity Luther states correctly thus:

"He expressly mentions adultery, because among the Jews it was a command and appointment that every one must be married. Therefore also the young were early married, so that the state of celibacy was held in small esteem, neither were public prostitution and lewdness tolerated as now. Therefore adultery was the most common form of unchastity among them." (*Ibid.*)

In his *Appeal to the German Nobility* Luther says:

"Is it not a terrible thing that we Christians should maintain public brothels, though we all vow chastity in our baptism? I well know all that can be said on this matter; that it is not peculiar to one nation, that it would be difficult to demolish it, and that it is better thus than that virgins, or married women, or honorable women should be dishonored. But should not the spiritual and temporal powers combine to find some means of meeting these difficulties without any such heathen practice? If the people of Israel existed without this scandal, why should not a Christian nation be able do so? How do so many towns and villages manage to exist without these houses? Why should not great cities be able to do so? ...It is the duty of those in authority to see the good of their subjects. But if those in authority considered how young people might be brought together in marriage, the prospect of marriage would help every man and protect him from temptations." (10:349; transl. by Waring.)

This is the Luther of whom Catholic writers say that he would not be considered qualified to sit with a modern Vice Commission.

But what about the many coarse references in Luther's writings to sexual matters-references which are unprintable nowadays? Do these not show that Luther was far from being even an ordinary gentleman, that he was depraved in thought and vulgar nauseating, in speech whenever he approached the subject of marriage and sexual conditions? We have just cited a few of Luther's references to these matters. They are clean and

proper. We could fill pages with them, and they would prove most profitable reading in our loose, profligate, and adulterous age. Those other references which are also found in Luther's writings should be studied in their connection. Leaving out of the account humorous references and playful remarks, which only malice can twist into a lascivious meaning, they are indignant and scornful expostulations with the defenders and practicers of vice that flaunted its shame in the face of the public. Righteous anger will give a person the courage to speak out boldly and in no mincing words about things which otherwise nauseate him. When Catholic writers cull from Luther vile and disgusting remarks about sexual affairs, it should be investigated to whom Luther made those remarks, and what reason he had for making them. There is another side to this matter, and that concerns medieval Catholicism itself. We have indicated in sundry places in this review the social conditions in respect of the sex relations that existed under the spiritual sovereignty of the Roman Church in Luther's day in the very city of Rome, and had grown up and were being fostered by her leading men. Luther's references to lustfulness are paraded as evidence of the lust that was consuming him; they are, in reality, evidences of the lust that he knew to be raging in very prominent people with whom he had dealings.

Luther's words and teaching would count for little if his personal conduct and his acts were in open contradiction to his chaste professions. We would simply have to set him down as a hypocrite. But so would the people in Luther's own day have done. It is a poor argument to say that the common people were no match for Luther in an argument. They were cowed into silence, they were afraid to tell him to his face that he ought to practice what he preached. Luther's work proved the spiritual emancipation of the common people, and one of the effects which mark his reformatory work is the intelligent layman, who forms his own judgment on what he hears and sees, and speaks out to his superiors. The Wittenbergers in Luther's day were not a set of ninnies; the constant association with the professors and students of the university, the growing fame of their town, which brought many strangers to it, important civil and religious affairs on which they had to come to a decision, had made many of them far-sighted and resolute men of affairs. Luther's home life before and after his marriage was open to public inspection as few homes are. The most intimate and delicate affairs had to be arranged before company at times. In a small town-and Wittenberg was no modern metropolis-what one person knows

becomes public information in a short time. Small communities have no secrets, or at least find it extremely difficult to have any.

But the lewdness which Luther attacked in his writings on chastity existed chiefly among persons of wealth and among the nobility. Not a few of them resented Luther's invectives against their mode of life. They surely did not lack the courage nor the ability to express themselves in retaliation against Luther if they had known him to be immoral himself while preaching morality to others. Last, not least, there were the Catholic priests and dignitaries of the Roman Church whose scandalous life Luther exposed. Aside from their disagreement from Luther in point of doctrine, personal revenge animated not a few of them with the desire to find a flaw in Luther's conduct. A few reckless spirits among them insinuated and declared openly that Luther was immoral, but the animus back of the charge was so well understood at the time, and the people who were in daily and close touch with Luther were so fully convinced of the purity of his life, that the charges were treated with contempt.

Luther's life from the age of puberty to his marriage was, indeed, a fight against temptations to unchastity. Is it anything else in the case of other men? The physical effects of adolescence, as we remarked before, are a natural and morally pure phenomenon; Luther's frank way of speaking of them does not make them impure. But this physical condition in a growing young man or woman may become the occasion for impure acts. Against these Luther strove as every Christian strives against them who has not the special grace of which our Lord speaks Matt. 19:12, in the first part of the verse. Luther had his flesh fairly well in subjection to the Spirit. History has not recorded those acts of immorality which his enemies insinuate or openly charge him with. The illegitimate children which are imputed to him were born in Catholic fancy. His constitutional amorous propensities, too, are fiction. Though Luther admits a few months prior to his marriage that he wears no armor plate around his heart, it is known that he had been all his life anything rather than a ladies' man.

Luther's courtship of Catherine — if we may call it that — was almost void of romance. The nine nuns who had fled from the cloister at Nimpschen to escape "the impurities of the life of celibacy," had turned to Wittenberg in their trouble. They were not seeking new impurities, but running away from old ones. What was more natural than that they should seek the protection of the man whose teaching had opened the road to



liberty for them. They did not come to Wittenberg to surrender themselves to Luther, but to seek his protection, advice, and help in beginning a new, natural life after the unnatural life which they had been leading. Luther responded to the call of distress. He did not receive them into his own domicile in the cloister where he lived, but found shelter for them with kind citizens of the town. Next, he found husbands for them. In less than two years after the escape from the cloister all had been respectably married, except Catherine. A love-affair of hers with Jerome Baumgaertner of Nuernberg had terminated unhappily, in spite of Luther's urging the young man. Another choice which Luther proposed to her — Dr. Glatz of Orlamuende — was declined peremptorily by Catherine, because, it seems, she had read the man's character. In declining this second offer, Catherine had made complaint to Luther's friend Amsdorf that Luther was trying to marry her against her will. She appears to have been a frank and resolute woman; in her conversation with Amsdorf she remarked that her decision would be altogether different if either he or even Luther were to ask for her hand. This was not, as has been said, a bald invitation to either of these two gentlemen, but only Catherine's energetic way of explaining what sort of a husband she would like, and why she would not take Glatz. Amsdorf so understood her remark and made nothing of it. By an accident he came to relate it to Luther six months later, when the latter had written to him in great despondency, describing his lonely life and the disorderly state of his domicile which needed very much the care of a woman's hand. Then it was that Amsdorf related what Catherine had remarked. Luther had never thought of her in such a relation. He had been attracted, it seems, by another of the nine escaped nuns, Ave von Schoenfeld, but whatever affection he may have entertained for her must have been a passing incident, never seriously entertained, for it must be remembered that at that time Luther declared that he would live and die a bachelor. Besides, Ave had now been happily married to another. At this juncture the influence of another woman enters into the private life of Luther. Argula von Staufen, a noblewoman who had been won over to the cause of the Reformation and was actively engaged in breaking down the power of the hierarchy even by her pen, wrote to Luther, expressing her surprise that he who had written so ably and so well on the holy estate of matrimony was still single. Among the peasants, too, the question was being debated whether Luther would follow up his preaching with the logical action. Luther was ruminating on these

matters when the Peasants' Revolt broke out, and with them in his mind went to Mansfeld. He soon reached the conclusion that he owed it to his profession as a preacher of the divine Word, to his Creator, to himself, and to the lonely Catherine to marry. He foresaw that the celibate clergy of Rome would raise a hue and cry about the act, but he considered it a noble work to offend these men, because they had by their law of celibacy offended the most holy God. He would marry to spite all of them, and the Pope, and the devil. This resolution was promptly carried out, for Luther was not in the habit of dallying long with serious matters. If he had asked his timid friend Melancthon, he would most likely have been advised against his marriage. Faint-hearted Philip was not the man to advise in a matter which at the time required a heroic faith. Philip, therefore, was duly shocked when he heard about it. His consternation is now used by Catholics to prove that he regarded Luther's marriage as a wanton act prompted by lust. This is utterly unhistorical: Philip was only afraid of the wild talk that would now be started against all of them. On the right and duty of the clergy to marry he believed with Luther.

And now a word about the chastity of Rome, particularly that peculiar brand which was inaugurated by Gregory VII for the Roman clergy and the religious of both sexes, and riveted upon them by the Council of Trent- the chastity of the celibate state. That the unnatural principle had never worked out toward true chastity, that the robbery which it has perpetrated on men and women had to be compensated for by connivance at, and open permission of, concubinage, is a matter of current knowledge. Luther's advice to priests and bishops who had opened their hearts to him on the state of their chastity to marry their cooks, even if they had to do it secretly; rather than maintain the other relation to them, was a good man's effort to meet a grave difficulty as best he could. This advice is now used to show that Luther was ready to approve any kind of cohabitation. The very opposite is true: it was because he did not approve of any kind of sexual intercourse, but because he desired to obtain some kind of a legal character for that relation, that he gave the advice to which we have referred.

Before the assembled representatives of the Church and of the German nation the following statements were read in Article XXIII of the Augsburg Confession: "There has been common complaint concerning the examples of priests who were not chaste. For that reason, also, Pope Pius is reported to have said that there were certain reasons why marriage was taken away

from priests, but that there were far weightier ones why it ought to be given back; for so Platina writes. Since, therefore, our priests were desirous to avoid these open scandals, they married wives, and taught that it was lawful for them to contract matrimony. First, because Paul says (1 Cor. 7:2): 'To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife.' Also (9): 'It is better to marry than to burn.' Secondly, Christ says (Matt. 19:11): 'All men cannot receive this saying,' where He teaches that not all men are fit to lead a single life; for God created man for procreation (Gen. 1:23). Nor is it in man's power, without a singular gift and work of God, to alter this creation. Therefore, those that are not fit to lead a single life ought to contract matrimony. For no man's law, no vow, can annul the commandment and ordinance of God. For these reasons the priests teach that it is lawful for them to marry wives. It is also evident that in the ancient Church priests were married men. For Paul says (1 Tim. 3:2) that a bishop should be the husband of one wife. And in Germany, four hundred years ago for the first time, the priests were violently compelled to lead a single life, who indeed offered such resistance that the Archbishop of Mayence, when about to publish the Pope's decree concerning this matter, was almost killed in the tumult raised by the enraged priests. And so harsh was the dealing in the matter that not only were marriages forbidden for the time to come, but also existing marriages were torn asunder, contrary to all laws, divine and human, contrary even to the canons themselves, made not only by the Popes, but by most celebrated councils.

"Seeing also that, as the world is aging, man's nature is gradually growing weaker, it is well to guard that no more vices steal into Germany. Furthermore, God ordained marriage to be a help against human infirmity. The old canons themselves say that the old rigor ought now and then, in the latter times, to be relaxed because of the weakness of men; which, it is to be devoutly wished, were also done in this matter. And it is to be expected that the churches shall at length lack pastors, if marriage should any longer be forbidden.

"But while the commandment of God is in force, while the custom of the Church is well known, while impure celibacy causes many scandals, adulteries, and other crimes deserving the punishments of just magistrates, yet it is a marvelous thing that in nothing is more cruelty exercised than against the marriage of priests. God has given commandment to honor marriage. By the laws of all well-ordered commonwealths, even among the

heathen, marriage is most highly honored. But now men, and also priests, are cruelly put to death, contrary to the intent of the canons, for no other cause than marriage. Paul (in 1 Tim. 4:3) calls that a doctrine of devils which forbids marriage. This may now be readily understood when the law against marriage is maintained by such penalties.

“But as no law of man can annul the commandment of God, so neither can it be done by any vow. Accordingly Cyprian also advises that women who do not keep the chastity they have promised should marry. His words are, these (Book I, Epistle XIX): ‘But if they be unwilling or unable to persevere, it is better for them to marry than to fall into the fire by their lusts; at least, they should give no offense to their brethren and sisters.’ And even the canons show some leniency toward those who have taken vows before the proper age, as heretofore has generally been the case.” (p. 48 f.)

Not a word of dissent arose in the august assembly while these facts and arguments were presented. The Germans had not forgotten the riotous proceedings and the cruel heartaches that were caused by the enforcement of the decrees of the Lenten Synod of 1074 under the theocratic Gregory VII, who wanted to set up a universal monarchy over the whole world and required an unmarried priesthood as his consecrated army. In his historical novel, *Die Letzten ihres Geschlechts*, M. Ruediger has graphically described the scenes enacted throughout Germany when Gregory’s inhuman order was put into effect.

Similar statements regarding priestly celibacy are found in Art. XXVII of the First, and in Art. XXIX of the Second Helvetic Confession of the Reformed. The Episcopal Church has declared itself to the same effect in Art. XXXII of the Thirty-nine Articles.

However, did not Luther and Catherine both perjure themselves by marrying? What about their religious vow, which had been given to God? Also on this matter we might cite Luther’s numerous statements and expository writings, but we prefer to quote again the Augsburg Confession which grew out of Luther’s testimony for the truth. In Article XXVII the Lutheran confessors state: "What is taught on our part concerning monastic vows will be better understood if it be remembered what has been the state of the monasteries, and how many things were daily done in those very monasteries, contrary to the canons. In Augustine’s time they were free associations. Afterward, when discipline was corrupted, vows were everywhere added for the purpose of restoring discipline, as in a carefully

planned prison. Gradually, many other observances were added besides vows. And these fetters were laid upon many before the lawful age, contrary to the canons. [Catherine von Bora had taken the veil at the age of sixteen.] Many also entered into this kind of life through ignorance, being unable to their own strength, though they were of sufficient age. Being thus ensnared, they were compelled to remain, even though some could have been freed by the provision of the canons. And this was more the case in convents of women than of monks, although more consideration should have been shown the weaker sex. This rigor displeased many good men before this time, who saw that young men and maidens were thrown into convents for a living, and what unfortunate results came of this procedure, and what scandals were created, what snares were cast upon consciences! They were grieved that the authority of the canons in so momentous a matter was utterly despised and set aside.

"To these evils was added an opinion concerning vows, which, it is well known, in former times, displeased even those monks who were more thoughtful. They taught that vows were equal to Baptism; they taught that, by this kind of life, they merited forgiveness of sins and justification before God. Yea, they added that the monastic life not only merited righteousness before God, but even greater things, because it kept not only the precepts, but also the so-called 'evangelical counsels.'

"Thus they made men believe that the profession of monasticism was far better than Baptism, and that the monastic life was mere meritorious than that of magistrates, than the life of pastors and such like, who serve their calling in accordance with God's commands, without any man-made services. None of these things can be denied; for they appear in their own books...

"These things we have rehearsed without odious exaggerations, to the end that the doctrine of our teachers, on this point, might be better understood. First, concerning such as contract matrimony." Here the 27th Article rehearses in the main the argument of Article XXIII.

"In the second place, why do our adversaries exaggerate the obligation or effect of a vow, when, at the same time, they have not a word to say of the nature of the vow itself, that it ought to be in a thing possible, free, and chosen spontaneously and deliberately? But it is not known to what extent perpetual chastity is in the power of man. And how few are they who have taken the vow spontaneously and deliberately! Young men and maidens,

before they are able to judge, are persuaded, and sometimes even compelled, to take the vow. Wherefore it is not fair to insist so rigorously on the obligation, since it is granted by all that it is against the nature of a vow to take it without spontaneous and deliberate action...

“But although it appears that God’s command concerning marriage delivers many from their vows, yet our teachers introduce also another argument concerning vows to show that they are void. For every service of God ordained and chosen of men without commandment of God to merit justification and grace is wicked as Christ says (Matt. 15:9): ‘In vain they worship Me with the commandments of men.’ And Paul teaches everywhere that righteousness is not to be sought by our own observances and acts of worship devised by men, but that it comes by faith to those who believe that they are received by God into grace for Christ’s sake.”

The confessors then proceed to show how spiritual pride was fostered by the monkish teaching of perfection, and how by their rites and ordinances and rules the true worship of God was obscured, and men were withdrawn from useful pursuits in life to be buried in cloisters. They conclude: “All these things, since they are false and empty, make vows null and void.” (p. 57 ff.)

Luther never had taken his own nor other monks’ vows lightly. He spoke and wrote to Melanchthon from the Wartburg against the mere throwing off of the vows on the ground that they were not binding anyway. He argued the sacredness of the oath, and held that first the consciences of those bound by vows must be set free through the evangelical teaching; then, when they are qualified to make an intelligent choice on spiritual grounds, they may discard their vows. When he married Catherine, he had long become a free man in his mind. So had Catherine.

Luther is charged with having entertained a purely secular view of the essence of marriage. It is true that Luther repudiated the Catholic view of the sacramental character of matrimony. By the teaching of the Roman Church a legal marriage can be effected only by the ratification of the marriage-promise and the blessing spoken over the couple by a consecrated priest, who thus, by his official quality, imparts to the marriage which he solemnizes a sacred character. In Luther’s days it was held that “the Church alone properly had jurisdiction over the question of marriage, and the canonical laws (of the Church) included civil as well as spiritual affairs. Luther repudiated these canonical laws on the subject of marriage, and

separated its civil from its ecclesiastical aspect. He maintained that marriage, as the basis of all family rights, lies entirely within the province of the State, and must be regulated of necessity by the civil government. 'Marriage and the married state,' he declared in his *Traubuechlein* (10:721), 'are civil matters, in the management of which we priests and ministers of the Church must not intermeddle. But when we are required, either before the church, or in the church, to bless the pair, to pray over them, or even to marry them, then it is our bounden duty to do so.'" (Waring, p. 221.)

In 1906, a papal decree was published which declares any betrothal or marriage entered into by a Catholic with a Catholic, or by a Catholic with a non-Catholic, to be valid only on condition that either the betrothal or the marriage take place in the presence or with the sanction of a Catholic priest. This decree is known as the *Ne Temere* decree. It is called thus according to a custom prevailing in the Catholic Church by which the official deliverances of the Popes are cited by giving the initial word, or words, of such a deliverance. The two Latin terms *Ne Temere* are a warning against reckless action, and the reckless action intended is the one indicated above.

We quote a few statements from the *Ne Temere* decree, from the work of Dr. Leitner of Passau, which was issued in its fifth edition at Regensburg in 1908. Dr. Leitner is a Catholic professor at Passau and bears the title "Doctor of Theology and Canon Law." Dr. Leitner's book is in German: *Die Verlobungs- und Eheschliessungsform nach dem Dekrete Ne Temere*, which means, "The Form of Betrothal and Marriage according to the *Ne Temere* Decree." Throughout his book the author cites the original language of the papal deliverance. The decree reaffirms, in the first place, the decree of the Council of Trent, to this effect: "The Holy Congregation declares any person who dares to enter into the estate of matrimony, except upon license from the parish priest or of some other priest of the same parish, or of the ordinary, and of two or three witnesses, incapacitated for such a contract, and contracts of this kind are declared null and void." (p.9.)

Regarding betrothals the decree declares: "Only such betrothals are regarded as valid and efficacious, according to the law of the Church, as are set down in a document signed by the contracting parties and by the parish priest, or the local ordinary, and by at least two witnesses."

Regarding marriage the decree hands down the following ruling: "Only such marriages are valid as are entered into in the presence of the parish priest, or the local ordinary, or of a priest delegated for the purpose by either

of these, and of two witnesses.” Again: “To the above law are amenable all persons baptized in the Catholic Church, also who have joined the Catholic Church from errorist or schismatic societies (notwithstanding the fact that either former or the latter have apostatized later) whenever they entered into betrothal or matrimony.” Lastly: “The laws apply to the aforementioned Catholics whenever they enter into betrothal or matrimony with non-Catholics, baptized or not, even when they have obtained a dispensation from the obstacle of a mixed religion or of a disparity of cult; except the Holy See decrees otherwise for a certain or locality.”

The operations of this decree have been peculiar. Some countries as Germany and Belgium, promptly secured exemption from it. In Canada the decree has caused law suits. One of them, *Morin vs. Le Croix*, was tried in Justice Greenshield’s court at Montreal, June 21:1912. The judge in his ruling said; “No Church, be it the powerful Roman Catholic Church, or the equally great and powerful Anglican Catholic Church, possesses any authority to overrule the civil law. Such authority as any Church has (in the matter of marriages) is given it by the civil law and is subservient to the civil law.”

The *Protestant Magazine*, in Vol. IV, No. 2, published a facsimile of a baptismal certificate for Anna Susanna Dagonya, daughter of Stephen Dagonya, Roman Catholic, and Mary Csoma, Reformed, who were married at Perth Amboy, N. J., August 4:1909, by Rev. Louis Nannassy, Reformed. Their child was born November 6:1910, and baptized by Rev. Francis Gross, priest of the Holy Cross Church at Perth Amboy. In writing out the baptismal certificate, the priest has stated that the child is illegitimate, and that the parents are living in concubinage.

Under the civil laws of most states the *Ne Temere* decree will lead to actions for libel. As related to the authority of the State, it is riotous and seditious. For the State will protect even those for whom the decree is specially published in their civil rights as over against their Church. But the decree shows to what absurdities the logical application of Rome’s teaching on matrimony leads. Concubinage — that is the name which it applies to every marriage which she has not sanctioned. Marriages of this kind began to be celebrated in countries which Rome had theretofore held firmly under its jurisdiction, when Martin Luther and Catherine von Bora were married. Accordingly, they are entitled to the distinction of being called the Adam



and Eve of the non-Catholic paradise of concubinage which pretends to be matrimony. Enough said.

## 26. Luther an Advocate of Polygamy

During the debate on the abolition of polygamy Congressman Roberts of Utah, on January 29, 1900, made a speech in the House of Representatives in which he said: “Here, in the resident portion of this city you erected — May 21:1884— a magnificent statue of stern old Martin Luther, the founder of Protestant Christendom. You hail him as the apostle of liberty and the inaugurator of a new and prosperous era of civilization for mankind, but he himself sanctioned polygamy with which I am charged. For me you have scorn, for him a monument.” Taking his cue from this Mormon speaker, one of the most recent of Luther’s Catholic critics remarks: “Let the wives and mothers of America ponder well the polygamous phase of the Reformation before they say ‘Amen’ to the unsavory and brazen laudations of the profligate opponent of Christian marriage, Christian decency, and Christian propriety. Compare the teachings of Luther on polygamy with those of Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet and visionary, and see their striking similarity. Mormonism in Salt Lake City, in Utah, which has brought so much disgrace to the American people, is but a legitimate outgrowth of Luther and Lutheranism.” This, then, is what will have to be done: a comparison will have to be instituted between the teaching of Martin Luther and that of the Mormon prophet on the subject of polygamy. We may assume that the teachings of the latter are universally known, and shall, accordingly, confine ourselves to Luther.

Two curious facts may be noted before we start our investigation of Luther’s writings: 1. Is it not remarkable that Joseph Smith himself does not cite Luther as his authority in defense of plural marriages? What an impression would the man have made, had he known what Mr. Roberts and some Catholics know! 2. Charging Lutheranism, that is, the Lutheran Church, with teaching polygamy, implies that the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church contain this teaching. The person who will furnish the

evidence for this charge from the Book of Concord, which contains the symbolical writings of the Lutheran Church, will become famous. Mr. Roberts was not so bold as to embrace Lutheranism among the sponsors of his polygamous cult; he only spoke of Luther. He was wise. And now, what does Luther say on the subject of polygamy? We pass by, as unworthy of note, Luther's humorous remarks made in a spirit of banter to his wife, that he would marry another wife. Only ill-will can find in this friendly jest an evidence of Luther's polygamous propensities.

Serious references to this matter occur in Luther's remarks on the practice of polygamy among the Israelites. The Mosaic account of Abraham's relation to Agar, the two marriages of Jacob, the regulations regarding women who had become captives in war, the harems of the kings of Judah and Israel,— all these Biblical records, which have perplexed many a student of the Bible, necessarily interested Luther as a theologian and expounder of the Scriptures. Every reader of the Bible has to form an opinion on these matters. Polygamous thoughts, therefore, did not originate in the lustful mind of Luther, but statements on the subject of polygamy were demanded of him as a religious teacher. He held that the polygamous relations which the Bible notes among the Israelites, even among saintly members of this people, must be explained either on the ground of a special dispensation of God for which we do not know the reason, or they must be regarded in the same light as Christ regarded the divorces among the Jews of His day, namely, as things which God permits among men because of their hardness of heart, and in order to prevent greater evils. (3:1556.) This view determined Luther's attitude toward Carlstadt, after this turbulent spirit had quitted Wittenberg and gone to Orlamuende, where he advocated, amongst other things, the introduction of polygamy. Inasmuch as Carlstadt did not mean to enforce his strange reforms by arms, as Muenzer and the peasants were doing, Luther inclined to condone his views on polygamy. He evidently regards this matter as a matter of public policy, like prostitution, which every community and commonwealth must regulate by such statutes as can be devised, "because of the hardness of men's hearts." Luther has frequently propounded this perfectly sound view regarding the life and conduct of non-Christians: since these people do not acknowledge the laws of God as binding, it matters little what practices they adopt. All that can be done to keep the animal impulses in them somewhat in check is to fix certain limits by means of civil laws beyond which their license may not go.

For their rejection of God's laws they will have to answer to their future Judge.

In a letter addressed to Joseph Levin Metzsch of December 9:1526, Luther says: "Your first question: Whether person may have more than one wife? I answer thus: Let unbelievers do what they please; Christian liberty, however, is regulated by love (charity), so that all that a Christian does is done to serve his fellow-man, provided only that he can render such service without jeopardy and damage to his faith and conscience. Nowadays, however, everybody is striving for a liberty that profits and pleases him, without regard for the profit and improvement which his neighbor might derive from his action. This is contrary to the teaching of St. Paul, who says: 'All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient' (1 Cor. 6:12). Only see that your liberty does not become an occasion to the flesh... Moreover, although the patriarchs had many wives, Christians may not follow their example, because there is no necessity for doing this, no improvement is obtained thereby, and, especially, there is no word of God to justify this practice, while great offense and trouble may come from it. Accordingly, I do not believe that Christians any longer have this liberty. God would have to publish a command that would declare such a liberty." (21a, 901 f.) To Clemens Ursinus, pastor at Bruck, Luther writes under date of March 21:1527: "Polygamy, which in former times was permitted to the Jews and Gentiles, cannot be honestly approved of among Christians, and cannot be engaged in with a good conscience, unless in an extreme case of necessity, as, for instance, when one of the spouses is separated from the other by leprosy or for a similar cause. Accordingly, you may say to the carnal people (with whom you have to do), if they want to be Christians, they must keep married fidelity and bridle their flesh, not give it license. If they want to be heathen, let them do what they please, at their own risk." (21a, 928.)

In his comment on the question of the Pharisees regarding divorce (Matt. 19:3-6), Luther says:

“Many divorces occur still among the Turks. If a wife does not yield to the husband, nor act according to his whim and fancy, he forthwith drives her out of the house, and takes one, two, three, or four additional wives, and defends his action by appealing to Moses. They have taken out of Moses such things as please them and pander to their lust. In Turkey they are very cruel to women; any woman that will not submit is cast aside. They toy with their women like a dog with a rag. When they are weary of one woman, they quickly put her beneath the turf and take another. Moses has said nothing to justify this practice. My opinion is that there is no real married life among the Turks; theirs is a whorish life. It is a terrible tyranny, all the more to be regretted because God does not withhold the common blessing from their intercourse: children are procreated thereby, and yet the mother is sent away by the husband. For this reason there is no true matrimony among the Turks. In my opinion, all the Turks at the present time are bastards.” (7, 965.)

All this is plain enough and should suffice to secure Luther against the charge of favoring polygamy. The seeming admission that polygamy might be permissible relates to cases for which the laws of all civilized nations make provisions. How a Christian must conduct himself in such a case must be decided on the evidence in each case. Likewise, the reference to the Christian’s liberty from the law does not mean that the Christian has the potential right to polygamy, but it means that he must maintain his monogamous relation from a free and willing choice to obey God’s commandments in the power of God’s grace. Polygamy, this is the firm conviction of Luther, could only be sanctioned if there were a plain command of God to that effect. Luther’s remarks about matrimony among the Turks should be remembered when Catholics cite Luther’s remarks about King Ahasuerus dismissing Vashti and summoning Esther, and the right of the husband to take to himself his maid-servant when his wife refuses him. By all divine and human laws the matter to which Luther refers is a just ground for divorce, and that is all that Luther declares.

But did not Luther sanction the bigamy of Philip of Hesse? So he did. Luther’s decision in this case must be studied in the light of all the evidence which we possess. Catholic theologians, before all others, should be able to appreciate Luther’s claim that what was said to the Landgrave was said to him “in the person of Christ,” as the counsel which a confessor gave to a burdened conscience. Catholics fail to mention that Luther repelled bigamous thoughts in Philip of Hesse fourteen years before the Landgrave took Margaret von der Saal. The evidence was found in the state archives at Kassel, now at Marburg, in a fragment of a letter which Niedner published in the *Zeitschrift fuer historische Theologie*, 1852, No. 2, p. 265. The letter is dated November 28:1526; Philip’s bigamous marriage took place March

9:1540. In this letter Luther says to Philip: “As regards the other matter, my faithful warning and advice is that no man, Christians in particular, should have more than one wife, not only for the reason that offense would be given, and Christians must not needlessly give, but most diligently avoid giving, offense, but also for the reason that we have no word of God regarding this matter on which we might base a belief that such action would be well-pleasing to God and to Christians. Let heathen and Turks do what they please. Some of the ancient fathers had many wives, but they were urged to this by necessity, as Abraham and Jacob, and later many kings, who according to the law of Moses obtained the wives of their friends, on the death of the latter, as an inheritance. The example of the fathers is not a sufficient argument to convince a Christian: he must have, in addition, a divine word that makes him sure, just as they had a word of that kind from God. For where there was no need or cause, the ancient fathers did not have more than one wife, as Isaac, Joseph, Moses, and many others. For this reason I cannot advise for, but must advise against, your intention, particularly since you are a Christian, unless there were an extreme necessity, as, for instance, if the wife were leprous or the husband were deprived of her for some other reason. On what grounds to forbid other people such marriages I know not” (21a, 900 f.) This letter effected that the Landgrave did not carry out his intention, but failing, nevertheless, to lead a chaste life, he did not commune, except once in extreme illness, because of his accusing conscience.

How Luther, fourteen years later, was induced to virtually reverse his opinion he has told himself in a lengthy letter to the Elector Frederick. This letter is Luther’s best justification. It is dated June 10, 1540, and reads:

“Most serene, high-born Elector, most gracious Lord:— I am sorry to learn that Your Grace is importuned by the court of Dresden about the Landgrave’s business. Your Grace asks what answer to give the men of Meissen. As the affair was one of the confessional, both Melancthon and I were unwilling to communicate it even to Your Grace, for it is right to keep confessional matters secret, both the sin confessed and the counsel given, and had the Landgrave not revealed the matter and the confessional counsel, there would never have been all this nauseating unpleasantness.— I still say that if the matter were brought before me today, I should not be able to give counsel different from what I did. Setting apart the fact that I know I am not as wise as they think they are, I need conceal nothing, especially as it has already been made known. The state of affairs is as follows: Martin Bucer brought a letter and pointed out that, on account of certain faults in the Landgrave’s wife, the Landgrave was not able to keep himself chaste, and that he had hitherto lived in a way which was not good, but that he would like to be at one with the principal heads of the Evangelic Church, and he declared solemnly before God and his conscience that he could not in future avoid such vices unless he were permitted to take another wife. We were deeply horrified at this tale and the offense which must follow, and we begged his Grace not to do as he proposed. But we were told again that he could not abandon his project, and if he could not obtain what he wanted from us, he would disregard us and turn to the Emperor and Pope. To prevent this we humbly begged that if his Grace would not, or, as he averred before God and his conscience, could not, do otherwise, yet that he could keep it a secret. Though necessity compelled him, yet he could not defend his act before the world and the imperial laws; this he promised to do, and we accordingly agreed to help him before God and cover it up as much as possible with such examples as that of Abraham. This all happened as though in the confessional, and no one can accuse us of having acted as we did willingly or voluntarily or with pleasure or joy. It was hard enough for our hearts, but we could not prevent it, we thought to give his conscience such counsel as we could.— I have indeed learned several confessional secrets, both while I was still a papist and later, which, if they were revealed, I should live to deny or else publish the whole confession. Such things belong not to the secular courts, nor are they to be published. God has here His own judgment, and must counsel souls in matters where no worldly law nor wisdom can help. My preceptor in the cloister, a fine old man, had many such affairs, and once had to say of them with a sigh: ‘Alas, alas! such things are so perplexed and desperate that no wisdom, law, nor reason can avail; one must commend them to divine goodness.’ So instructed, I have, accordingly, in this case also acted agreeably to divine goodness.— But had I known that the Landgrave had long before satisfied his desires, and could well satisfy them with others, as I have now just learned that he did with her of Eschwege, truly no angel would have induced me to give such counsel. I gave it only in consideration of his unavoidable necessity and weakness, and to put his conscience out of peril, as Bucer represented the case to me. Much less would I ever have advised that there should be a public marriage, to which (though he told me nothing of this) a young princess and young countess should come, which is truly not to be borne and is insufferable to the whole empire. But I understood and hoped, as long as he had to go the common way with sin and shame and weakness of the flesh, that he would take some honorable maiden or other in secret marriage, even if the relation did not have a legal look before the world. My concession was on account of the great need of his conscience — such as happened to other great lords. In like manner I advised certain priests in the Catholic lands of Duke George and the bishops secretly to marry their cooks.— This was my confessional counsel about which I would much rather have kept silence, but it has been wrung from me, and I could do nothing but speak. But the men of Dresden speak as though I had taught the same for thirteen years, and yet they give us to understand what a friendly heart they have to us, and

what great desire for love and unity, just as if there were no scandal or sin in their lives, which are ten times worse before God than anything I ever advised. But the world must always smugly rail at the mote in its neighbor's eye, and forget the beam in its own eye. If I must defend all I have said or done in former years, especially at the beginning, I must beg the Pope to do the same, for if they defend their former acts (let alone their present ones), they would belong to the devil more than to God.— I am not ashamed of my counsel, even if it should be published in all the world; but for the sake of the unpleasantness which would then follow, I should prefer, if possible, to have kept it secret. Martin Luther, with his own hand.” (21b, 2467; transl. by Preserved Smith.)

About a year later a Hessian preacher, by the name of Johann Lening, undertook to justify the bigamy of the Landgrave. Under the pseudonym “Huldricus Neobulus” he published a “Dialogus,” that is, “an amicable conversation between two persons on the question whether it is in accordance with, or contrary to, divine, natural, imperial, and spiritual laws for a person to have more than one wife at a time,” etc. The writer defended bigamy. In an unfinished reply to this book Luther takes strong grounds against him. Referring to the author's argument that bigamy was sanctioned by Moses, Luther says:

“The reference to the fathers of whom Moses speaks is irrelevant: Moses is dead. Granted, however, that bigamy was legal in the days of the fathers and Moses, — which can never be established,— still they had God's word for it that such a permission was given them. That we have not. And although it was permitted to the Jews and tolerated by God, while God Himself considered it wrong, ...it was merely a dispensation... Now, there is a great difference between a legal right and a dispensation, or something that is tolerated or permitted. A legal right is not a dispensation, and a dispensation is not a legal right; whoever does, obtains, or holds something by a dispensation does not do, obtain, or hold it by legal right.” Luther then enters upon a brief discussion of the bigamous relationships which were created by the Mosaic laws, and explains that legislation as emergency legislation. He says: “What need is there why we should try to find all sorts of reasons to explain why the fathers under Moses were permitted to have many wives? God is sovereign; He may abrogate, alter, mitigate a law as He pleases, for emergency's sake or not. But it does not behoove us to imitate such instances, much less to establish them as a right. But this Tulrich [so Luther calls the unknown author] rashly declares carnal lust free, and wants to put the world back to where it was before the Flood, when they took them wives, not like the Jews by God's permission, or because of an emergency or for charity's sake towards homeless women, as Moses directs, but, as the text says, ‘which they chose’ (Gen. 6:2). That is the way nowadays to rise to the stars. In this way we have Moses and the fathers with their examples as beautiful cloaks for carnal liberty; we say with our lips that we are following the examples of the fathers, but in very deed we act contrary to them. Lord, have mercy! If the world continues, what all may we not expect to happen these times, if even now shameless fellows may print what they please.” (21b, 2691 f.)



One might go more exhaustively into the evidence, but the materials here submitted will suffice to convince most men that, while Luther's advice to Philip did create a bigamous relation, Luther was not a defender of bigamy. Every one who has had to deal with questions relating to married life knows that situations arise in the matrimonial relation which simply cannot be threshed out in public, and in which the honest advice of a pious person is invoked to find a way out of a complication. That was the situation confronting Luther: what he advised was meant as an emergency measure to prevent something that was worse. In the same manner Luther had expressed the opinion that it would have been easier to condone a bigamous relation in Henry VIII of England than the unjust divorce which the king was seeking. As a matter of fact, however, Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues were grossly hoodwinked in the matter, both by the Landgrave himself and, what is worse, by the Landgrave's court-preacher, Bucer. Had the true facts been known, the advice, as Luther clearly states, would never have been given. But we can well understand how Luther can declare that under the circumstances under which he thought he was acting he could not have given any different advice. Personally, we have always resented the veiled threat in the Landgrave's request that he would apply to the Pope or the Emperor. Perhaps the remark was not understood as a threat, but as an expression of despair. At any rate, Philip was confident of getting from Rome what he was not sure of obtaining from Luther.

Ought not this remark of the Landgrave caution Luther's Catholic critics to be very careful in what they say about the heinousness of Luther's offense in granting a dispensation from a moral precept? Have they really no such thing as a "dispensation" at Rome? Has not the married relationship come up for "dispensation" in the chancelleries of the Vatican innumerable times? Has not one of the canonized saints of Rome, St. Augustine, declared that bigamy might be permitted if a wife was sterile? Was not concubinage still recognized by law in the sixteenth century in Ireland? Did not King Diarmid have two legitimate wives and two concubines? And he was a Catholic. What have Catholics to say in rejoinder to Sir Henry Maine's assertion that the Canon Law of their Church brought about numerous sexual inequalities? Or to Joseph MacCabe's statement that not until 1060 was there any authoritative mandate of the Church against polygamy, and that even after this prohibition there were numerous instances of concubinage and polygamic marriages in Christian communities? Or to

Hallam in his *Middle Ages*, where he reports concubinage in Europe? Or to Lea, who proves that this evil was not confined to the laity? (See Gallighan, *Women under Polygamy*, pp. 43. 292. 295. 303. 330. 339.)

All that has so far been said about Luther's views on the subject of polygamy could be most powerfully reinforced by a review of Luther's teaching on matrimony as a divine institution, which Luther consistently throughout his writings regards as monogamous. But this is too well known to require restatement, and is really outside of the scope of this review, which must content itself with submitting the direct argument in rebuttal of the Catholic charge of Luther's advocacy of polygamy. This polygamous Luther, too, is a vision that is rendered possible only through spectacles of hopeless bias.

## 27. Luther Announces His Death

Mark Twain awoke one morning to find himself reported dead. He did not accept the invitation suggested in the report, but wired to his friends: "Reports of my death grossly exaggerated." Luther was placed in a similar predicament by Catholics who were deeply interested in the question how long he was to continue to live. One day, in the early part of March, 1545, he was handed a printed letter in Italian which contained the news of his demise under curious circumstances. He thought that he ought not to withhold this interesting information from the world: he had a German translation made of the document, which he published with his remarks as follows:

"Copy of a Letter of the Ambassador of the Most Christian King regarding a Horrible Sign which Occurred in the Shameful Death of Martin Luther.

"A horrible and unheard-of miracle which the blessed God has wrought in the shameful death of Martin Luther, who went to hell, soul and body, as may be clearly seen from a chapter of the letter of the ambassador of the Most Christian King, to the praise and glory of Jesus Christ and the confirmation and comfort of the faithful.

*"Copy of the Letter.*

"1. Martin Luther, having been taken ill, desired the holy Sacrament of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. He died immediately upon receiving it. When he saw that his sickness was very violent and he was near death, he prayed that his body might be placed on an altar and worshiped as God. But the goodness and providence of God had resolved to put an end to his great error and to silence him forever. Accordingly, God did not omit to work this great miracle, which was very much needed, to cause the people to desist from the great, destructive, and ruinous error which the said Luther has caused in the world. As soon as his body had been placed in the grave, an awful rumbling and noise was heard, as if hell and the devils were collapsing. All present were seized with a great fright, terror, and fear, and when they raised their eyes to heaven, they plainly saw the most holy host of our Lord Jesus Christ which this unworthy man was permitted to receive unworthily. I affirm that all who were present saw the most holy host visibly floating in the air. They took the most holy host very devoutly and with great reverence, and gave it a decent place in the sanctuary.

"2. When this had been done, no such tumult and hellish rumbling was heard any more that day. However, during the following night, at the place where Martin Luther's corpse had been buried, there was heard by everybody in the community a much greater confusion than the first time. The people arose and flocked together in great fear and terror. At daybreak they went to open the grave where the wicked body of Luther had been placed. When the grave was opened, you could clearly see that there was no body, neither flesh nor bone, nor any clothes. But such a sulphuric stench rose from the grave that all who were standing around the grave turned sick. On account of this miracle many have reformed their lives by returning to the holy Christian faith, to the honor, praise, and glory of Jesus Christ, and to the strengthening and confirmation of His holy Christian Church, which is a pillar of truth."

Luther appended the following comment to this pious document:

"And I, Martinus Luther, D., do by these indentures acknowledge and testify that I have received this angry fiction concerning my death on the twenty-first day of March, and that I have read it with considerable pleasure and joy, except the blasphemous portion of the document in which this lie is attributed to the exalted majesty of God. Otherwise I felt quite tickled on my knee-cap and under my left heel at this evidence how cordially the devil and his minions, the Pope and the papists, hate me. May God turn them from the devil!

"However, if it is decreed that theirs is a sin unto death, and that my prayer is in vain, then may God grant that they fill up their measure and write nothing else but such books for their comfort and joy. Let them run their course; they are on the right track; they want to have it so. Meanwhile I want to know how they are going to be saved, and how they will atone for and revoke all their lies and blasphemies with which they have filled the world."  
(21b, 3376 f.)

Similar, even more grotesque tales have been served the faithful by Catholic writers. The star production of this kind was published years ago in the *Ohio-Waisenfreund*. It related that horrible and uncanny signs had accompanied Luther's death. Weird shrieks and noises were heard, devils were flying about in the air; the heavens were shrouded in a pall of gloom. When the funeral cortege started from Eisleben, a vast flock of ravens had gathered and accompanied the corpse croaking incessantly and uttering dismal cries all the way to Wittenberg, etc., etc.

These crude stories have now been censored out of existence. Catholics nowadays prefer to lie in a more refined and cultured manner about Luther's death: Luther committed suicide; he was found hanging from his bedpost one morning.

Comment is unnecessary.

Luther died peacefully in the presence of friends, confessing, Christ and asserting his firm allegiance to the faith he had proclaimed with his last breath. The probable cause of his death was a stroke of paralysis. Luther began to feel pains in the chest late in the afternoon of February 17:1546. He bore up manfully and continued working at his business for the Count of Mansfeld who had called him to Eisleben. After a light evening meal he sat chatting in a cheerful mood with his companions, and retired early, as was his custom in his declining years. The pains in the chest became worse, and he began to feel chilly. Medicaments were administered, and after a while he fell into a slumber, which lasted an hour. He awoke with increased pain and a feeling of great congestion, which caused the death-perspiration to break out. He was rapidly turning cold. All this time he was praying and reciting portions from the Psalms and other texts. Three times in succession he repeated his favorite text, John 3:16. Gradually he became peaceful, and his end was so gentle that the bystanders were in doubt whether he had expired or was only in a swoon. They worked with him, trying to rouse him, until they were convinced that he had breathed his last. The Catholic apothecary John Landau, who had been called in while Luther was thought to be in a swoon, helped to establish the fact of his death.

## 28. Luther's View of His Slanderers

Luther was the subject of gross misrepresentation and vile slander during his lifetime. At first he used to correct erroneous reports about himself, usually in his polemical writings, later he merely noted them with a brief and scornful comment, and finally ignored them altogether. He relates that he had treated many slanderous publications of Eck, Faber, Emser, Cochlaeus, and many others with silent contempt. (18, 1991; 14:331.) It was a physical impossibility for him to reply to all the misleading and vicious reports that were being circulated about him. He was convinced that he must use his time and strength for more necessary matters. His friends in many instances relieved him of the unpleasant task. Moreover, after he had answered those who had first assailed him in the beginning of his public activity, he could afford to disregard many slanders, because they were mere repetitions.

Luther was aware that he was probably the worst-hated man of his times. He declares his belief that in the last hundred years there has not lived a man to whom the world was more hostile than to himself. (22, 1660.) Persons praising him, he says, are regarded as having committed a more grievous sin than any idolater, blasphemer, perjurer, fornicator, adulterer, murderer, or thief. (9:553.) Anything that Luther has said, he observes, is denounced as coming from the devil; what Duke George (one of his fiercest enemies), Faber, or Bucer say or do is highly approved, (4:1606.) Like Elijah, he was charged with having disturbed Israel: before he began preaching there was peace and quiet, now all is confusion. (9:587.) He is held responsible for the Peasants' Revolt and the rise of the Sacramentarian sects. (22:1602.) A laborer whom his wife had hired became drunk and committed murder; at once the rumor was spread that Luther kept a murderer as his servant. (21b, 2225.) What he writes is represented as having been inspired by envy, pride, bitterness, yea, by Satan himself;

those, however, who write against him are regarded as being inspired by the Holy Ghost. (18:2005.) He observes that beggars become rich, obtain favors from princes and kings, remunerative positions, honors, and bishoprics by turning against him. (18:2005.) Some attribute the election of Adrian VI as Pope to Luther (this Pope was believed to favor reforms: he did not last long); and Luther expects that he is helping Dr. Schmid to become a cardinal because he is opposing him. (19:1347.) Dunces become doctors, knaves become saints, and the most besotted characters are glorified when they try their vile mouths and pens against Luther. (19:1347.) The easiest way for any man to become a canonized saint even during his lifetime, though he were a person of the stripe of a Nero or Caligula, is by hating Luther. (18:2005.) On the cover of the pamphlet containing his Sermon on the Sacrament Luther ordered a picture consisting of two monstrances printed; this was promptly explained to mean that he had adopted the Bohemian errors, for Hus had administered the Lord's Supper in both kinds. (19:457.) Some pretended that they could see two geese in this picture; the meaning was plain: one of them signified Hus (Hus in Bohemian means goose), the other, Luther. (19:458.)

Luther would not have been human if incidents like these had not caused him pain. Occasionally he would give vent to his grief, but his manly courage, too, would soon assert itself, and he would expose the hollowness, insincerity, and futility of the lying tales that were spread about him. At a public meeting in Campo Flore he was cursed, sentenced to death, and burned in effigy. (21a, 174.) He has read offensive reports about himself, and puts them down with the calm declaration: There is not a man that writes against Luther without having to resort to horrible and manifest lies. (19:583.) He is sure that he has not had an opponent who in an argument would stick to the point; they all had to evade the issue. (22:658.) Shameful falsehoods are canvassed about him at the court of King Ferdinand (15:2623); Luther comforts himself with the reflection that others have suffered the same vilification before him, for instance, Wyclif, Hus, and others (5:308). Besides, he is able to understand that the real reason why the papists regard him as such a perverse and untractable person is because they are utterly perverse themselves. (4:1499.)

But his sweetest comfort is in reflecting that it is his preaching which has brought his manifold afflictions upon him. Poor Luther is always wrong: the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists hate him worse than they hate

the Pope, and the Pope hates him worse than he hates other heretics, because they all fight against the Gospel which Luther preaches. (22, 1015.) If I were to keep silent, he says, or preach as I used to do, concerning indulgences, pilgrimages, adoration of the saints, purgatory, the carnival of the Mass, I could easily keep the favor and friendship of the great. (8:569.) But for the sake of the true doctrine and those who profess it,—whom his opponents wish to suppress, Luther is willing to suffer hatred, persecution, calumnies, and everything else that his enemies may devise against him. (5:587.) What have I done, he exclaims, to deserve the enmity of the Pope and his rabble, except that I have preached Christ? (8:569.) He is convinced from the papists' own confession that he is being persecuted for no other reason than because he is preaching the Gospel. (8:399.)

Knowing the reason why he is hated, Luther glories in his tribulations. Duke George, he says, calls me a desperate, low-bred, perjured knave: I shall consider those ugly names my emeralds, rubies, and diamonds. (19, 457.) He would fear that there must be something wrong about his teaching if the people whom he knows would not fight against him: if these people do not condemn his doctrine, his doctrine cannot be acceptable to God. (10:351.) He prefers to have them rage against him. Their violence shall not disturb him greatly, because he has championed the Lord's cause, and that, in all sincerity, without malice toward any person. (21a, 301.) . Let the papists exhaust themselves in slanders against him: he knows he has the Scriptures on his side, and they have the Scriptures against them. (5:310.) They intend to grind Luther to pieces, not a hair of him is to remain; he knows that they will not be able to harm a hair on his head. (8:119.)

Thus Luther thought and spoke of his detractors and defamers. Such was his comfort and his courage in the face of base calumnies and undeserved hatred. Those who know him best will continue to love him, and admire him the more for the enemies he has made.



# Afterword

IF THE READER of this book has had the sensation of a traveler in a storm-tossed vessel, he has experienced mentally what Luther faced in dread reality during almost the whole of his agitated life. He had to weather many a squall, and storm, and hurricane. Outwardly his life seems a continuous hurly-burly. Yet there is in this man's heart a great and holy calm. The tumult of his life is all on the surface. He reminds one of the lines in Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Hymn":

When winds are raging o'er the upper ocean,  
And billows wild contend with angry roar,  
'T is said, far down beneath the wild commotion,  
That peaceful stillness reigneth evermore.

Far, far beneath, the noise of tempest dieth,  
And silver waves chime ever peacefully,  
And no rude storm, how fierce soe'er it flieth,  
Disturbs the Sabbath of that deeper sea.

We have had glimpses of the hidden depths in Luther's mind: his thought reaches down to the lowest depths of human misery, and then goes deeper still towards the limits of God's rescuing love and conquering grace which human mind has never reached. For these divine profundities no plummet will ever sound. He who could surrender himself wholly to the study of the greatness and beauty of Luther's constructive thought would enjoy a spiritual luxury and be drawn into that sublime and solemn peace of God which passes all understanding. He would behold this strenuous man; who has been shown mostly in his working-clothes in these pages, in his holiday-attire, with that Sabbath in his heart which occurs wherever Christ is the loved and adored object of the thinker's contemplation.

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# How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

## Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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