LUTHER

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humanistic influences, even though these were to be found least of all in the monastery and in the theological faculties. But it was in the monastery that Luther became the man he was to be. Even as a reformer he wore the cowl; that is true even if one is not inclined to see the evangelical Luther at far too early a date. The questions he asked were those with which he had already tortured himself in the monastery, even if he later acquired and gave entirely different answers from those he had received in the monastery and in the Erfurt lecture halls. The famous theory that Luther still belongs in the Middle Ages is certainly not correct in the form in which Ernst Troeltsch proclaimed, but it does contain a core of truth. Luther was in very strong measure under obligation to medieval theology. Much as he could concur with the critique that the humanists leveled at Scholasticism, still he preserved for the church of a new era much from Scholasticism that retains an abiding validity — its questions about sin and grace and about salvation. What he rejected in the Scholastic heritage, he actually overcame within himself. He was receptive to much that the monastery and the traditional theology could not give. But, as we can only reiterate with emphasis, he must be understood primarily on the basis of his theological and spiritual training and from the great spiritual concerns that were stamped upon his character.

II

Luther's Development

4. Home and School

Luther, as is well known, was born on November 10, 1483. Whether the family's recollection of the year is reliable has been subjected to doubt again and again, since there are also statements from which it was thought that another year had to be deduced. The question no longer arouses much discussion today, and is of no essential consequence. Luther's parents, Hans Luther and Margarete née Lindemann (not Ziegler), had left Möhra, south of Eisenach, because the father was not the eldest son of a peasant, entitled to an inheritance, and the obvious choice for him was to seek his livelihood in mining. Eisleben was only a temporary residence of the family. When Martin, the oldest of the children who survived, was a half year old, the father settled in Mansfeld, where he remained. He had a number of other children, who occasionally emerge in Luther's life without affording us a precise picture of the relationships of them all. At a very early age little Martin entered the town school in Mansfeld. When he was fourteen years old, in 1497, he was sent to Magdeburg to attend the Latin school, but soon thereafter, for reasons that are hardly clear, he transferred to Eisenach and spent his school years there as a pupil in St. George's School. In 1501 he became a student in Erfurt.

Naturally, a whole mass of details are known about Luther's youth. To deal with them in detail is hardly rewarding. One question seems important to us today: From what level of society did Luther come? His grandparents were peasants, and his parents had not long outgrown the peasant status. Anyone who grew up in Mansfeld, moreover, found peasant life and customs in the immediate vicinity. Is Luther therefore really a peasant? He has frequently been regarded so, and many of his characteristics, his stubbornness, his coarseness, his conservatism which often broke through the passionate revolutionary in a strange way, have been explained from this standpoint. But was the peasant world actually that which surrounded and shaped Luther? Did Luther retain a lasting bond with peasant life and thought? In Wittenberg he would have had to speak *Plattdeutsch* — Low German — or even Sorbian [Wendish], if he had felt particularly bound to the peasantry. What is quite certain is that his family's past had not acquainted him with the peasant's problems that were pressing in southwestern and western Germany and that ultimately precipitated the Peasants' War. The Luthers in Möhra were so-called *Erbzinser* [hereditary tenant farmers] — the charge levied on their property was scarcely anything other than a kind of land tax, which was not felt to be too oppressive — and they were personally free. Luther's bond with the peasantry did not extend very much farther than an awareness of the peasants' toilsome work and of the scant honor and prestige to be achieved by it.

Neither was Luther a child of the town life of Germany, however, if one considers town life in terms of the famous German cultural centers such as Nuremberg, Augsburg, and many others. Neither his birthplace nor any of his places of schooling is even remotely comparable to the

town centers of cultural life in Germany. Nevertheless, Luther grew up in a town environment, and his family even had its place among the major influences of town life. Luther's father, independent lessee of a smelting furnace, became a ward representative (*Viertelsmeister*). German towns were divided either into parishes or into quarters (*Viertel* [wards], occasionally also designated according to streets). The ward representative was the spokesman of the community over against the town council, or at times only of the so-called commoners, in other words, those who neither belonged to the patriciate nor were organized into guilds. It is questionable whether we must reckon with excessively sharp cleavages between classes in Mansfeld such as were found in the great cities, particularly the imperial cities. At any rate, Luther's family was rooted in the stratum of the common townsmen. The ambition to climb economically and educationally was nothing unusual among the leading personalities of these circles, and a certain openness to the new can be expected from them as a matter of course.

It can hardly be claimed that Luther received a special heritage of an ecclesiastical and religious nature from his home. We know of no relatives of Luther who were priests or monks. It was quite otherwise with Zwingli. Of course, Father and Mother Luther were regular attendants at Mass, and there is not the slightest evidence in the Luther family of a sectarian opposition against the predominant patterns of church life. Indeed, true and genuine piety surely prevailed in the Luther home, tinged with the superstition that was a matter of course in the miners' world. The religious atmosphere of Luther's parental home, however, had absolutely nothing extraordinary about it. All we know is that the elder Luther wanted his son neither sent to the

monastery nor ordained a secular priest. The possibility must be reckoned with that in the circles to which he belonged there generally existed such an attitude. But that this spirit of the parental home, which according to the notions of the day might be called " progressive," essentially determined the development of the son Luther can hardly be presumed.

The course of Luther's schooling presents a picture similar in every respect to that of his religious inheritance. Apart from the fact that his father was especially anxious to help at least his eldest son to get ahead, and to procure for him a position of esteem, and apart from the period of schooling, which lasted only a very short time and which remains very obscure to us, Luther's career in school has absolutely nothing unusual about it. That Luther earned his support as a choirboy, a poor scholar who sang before people's homes, both in Magdeburg and in Eisenach, is likewise nothing out of the ordinary, and by no means a sign of special poverty. That Latin grammar was taught according to Donatus and syntax according to Alexander of Villedieu, and that scholars were made to read certain authors of classical antiquity such as Pseudo-Cato, Aesop, and Terence, had nothing to do with humanism and the revival of classical studies, but corresponded to late medieval practice. In general, unlike other reformers, Luther did not stand under humanistic influences during his school days. The Latin that he learned and that he wrote and spoke effortlessly in the monastery and in the professorial chair was the medieval Latin of the monks, and no humanistic Latin trained in Cicero or similar models. Luther later expressed himself critically from time to time on the harshness and unreasonableness of the pedagogy of the rod. There is no evidence that the practice which he

himself experienced in this respect had exceeded the customary bounds in any direction.

Only in Magdeburg did Luther live under influences that were noteworthy. His teachers were so-called *Nullbrüder* [literally, Zero Brothers], that is, members of the Brethren of the Common Life. They belonged to a late medieval pious movement, the *Devotio Moderna,* which had taken hold in monastic circles (Augustinian Canons, Windesheim Congregation) and in circles of townsmen. It cultivated a warm, heartfelt piety and a personal familiarity with the Holy Scriptures. The Brethren took a special interest in the education of the young. Between this late form of German mysticism, which practiced a " simple Christianity " — as is the case with the *Devotio Moderna* — and humanism, which also paid allegiance to the ideal of a *simplicitas Christianismi,* existed a certain affinity. We know of humanists who had connections with the *Devotio;* Alexander Hegius and no less a person than Erasmus belonged to it. Thus when one views the Magdeburg period, one can indeed speak of a point at which the humanistic and mystical spirit may have influenced Luther. But this dare not be exaggerated, and even the simple personal influence of the Brethren must not be appraised too highly. Luther developed a certain liking for the warm, inward piety of the Brethren, and kept it throughout his life. But the influences of German mysticism upon Luther do not originate as early as this period, and in later days he radically turned his back upon the pious ideal of the " imitation of Christ," which was also the title of the famous book of the *Devotio Moderna* by Thomas à Kempis.

A sympathetic investigation of the particulars that have come down to us from Luther's youth would help, of course, to bring out many a detail that indeed would give

us a hint of the later Luther. It can hardly be claimed, however, that Luther's early education exercised a basic influence upon the future Reformer.

5. University, Monastery, and Priesthood

In the year 1501, Luther began his study in Erfurt. His father might have selected Erfurt because the law faculty there had a good reputation. That the son must follow a secular vocation was a settled question for the father, and the most distinguished profession at the time, and one attainable by a townsman, was that of a law-trained administrative official in a town council or in a princely court. Without advanced study, including some time at an Italian university, however, no great eminence was to be attained.

To study the two laws immediately was, to be sure, entirely out of the question for Luther as a neophyte at the university. First he must study for three years in the faculty of arts. The seven disciplines treated there are in our present-day concepts secondary-school subjects. The faculty of arts offered not much more than the material presented in the advanced classes of a German secondary school. It dealt with grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric (the *trivium*), and geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy (the *quadrivium*). In certain circumstances it was possible to hear a lecture on one of the ancient classical authors by a humanist who happened to be at the university (see above, page 25). There was no possibility that Luther could systematically have learned Greek or Hebrew in the Erfurt of that time. The humanistic reform of the universities, on the whole, was first carried through by Melanchthon from Wittenberg.

Can one speak of a definite spirit prevailing in the

faculty of arts in which Luther studied and can one accordingly assume a decisive influence of philosophical studies upon Luther? The question, we believe, must be answered affirmatively. The teaching in the faculty of arts was done by instructors who were at the same time studying in a higher faculty, mostly the theological, or who had studied there earlier, and occasionally were later promoted to become theology professors. A theological position that gave its stamp to the theological studies of a university must inevitably have exercised an influence in the general studies. We also know even Luther's philosophical teachers — Bartholomew Arnoldi, of Usingen in Nassau, who was known as Usingen, and Jodocus Trutvetter, of Eisenach. Both were nominalists, Occamists, and we must already take Occamism into account for the Luther of the school of arts.

The event in Luther's life that above all calls for an explanation is his apparently sudden entry into the monastery of the Augustinian Hermits in Erfurt on July 17, 1505, a step that Luther took soon after he had completed his study of the arts with a promotion to the rank of master. It was occasioned by a vow that Luther had made in mortal terror fifteen days earlier, on the second of July, during a thunderstorm while he was walking on the way from Mansfeld to Erfurt in the vicinity of the village of Stotternheim. The details as such are clear, but to explain the event means to explain what went before, and that is extraordinarily difficult. The explanation that a learned Roman Catholic Franciscan of our times, Dr. Reinold Weijenborg, has seriously advanced — that Luther had a school debt with his father which he was trying to settle cheaply and therefore fled to the monastery, his flight thus having a realistic background similar to the flight of Jacob before

Laban, according to Gen., ch. 31 (evidence of this allegedly in Luther's exposition of Genesis of 1535–1545) — is absurd and devoid of any support. But what was the actual motive for Luther's entry into a mendicant monastery? Do the reasons lie entirely in the realm of the personal? A friend of Luther's is said to have died suddenly, perhaps from tuberculosis. Only a short time before, Luther himself apparently had suffered a dangerous dagger wound, which made it clear to him how suddenly he might have to answer before the eternal Judge. From the traditions concerning these matters it is exceedingly difficult to draw the boundary between reliable tradition and Luther-legend.

Luther's entry into the monastery is hardly to be explained from his parental home. It is well known that the father reacted quite negatively to Luther's step, which ruined all the plans he had for his son. At best one can look for connections between the entry into the monastery and the somewhat somber atmosphere of the parental home, characterized by harsh rearing. But are we not in danger of exaggeration here?

Did Luther have a vague feeling that jurisprudence was not his line? That Luther, who now would have to study the two laws, was not cut out to be a jurist is certain. But it could not have involved more than a vague feeling.

Did Luther have a pathological predisposition to melancholy? The enormous spiritual assaults that he experienced in the monastry, and which remain to be discussed, have for a long time attracted the attention of psychologists and physicians. In a ponderous study more than twenty years ago, a Danish physician, Paul Reiter, significantly a Catholic convert, has given Luther a thoroughly psychiatric appraisal and out of the history of Luther's illnesses constructed an endogenous psychosis.

Or do the grounds for Luther's sudden entry into the monastery lie rather in the theological realm? It is hard to avoid asking, even concerning the moment of his entry into the monastery, what the Occamism of Erfurt could have meant for the young student. The Erfurt Occamists were pupils of the last great Occamist, Gabriel Biel, of Tübingen, who, however, had his own special brand of theology. Hence, they stood at any rate indirectly within the Occamist tradition. And Occam, an English Franciscan of the first half of the fourteenth century, in turn stands with his entire line of thought within the tradition of the Franciscan school in general. For the Franciscans, at least after Duns Scotus, God is not, as for Thomas Aquinas and his school, the supreme invisible Being, but the almighty Will. His absolute omnipotence, freedom, and majesty constitute God's divine nature, and the entire Franciscan theology is a theology of the sovereignty of God. Even its theory of knowledge is determined from this standpoint. God is knowable, not through reason, with which we seek to comprehend him, but by revelation, through which in freedom he gives himself to be known by us. Salvation comes to him whom God has elected for it by an "acceptation" of God. True, the Franciscans see perfect freedom not only in God himself: Man too is a free being. He has the full capacity to do good and to make himself worthy of acceptation. The Franciscan doctrine of salvation, especially the Occamist view, also reckons with human freedom and results in a dramatic contest between God's freedom and men's. There is more than one way in which the man who finds himself oppressed by Occamist theological principles may react toward them inwardly. Occamism also was often felt to be a very sure way to God's acceptance.

Precisely this sure way Luther now apparently wanted to tread, with distress on account of his present condition but with hope in the good works through which he might now become perfect and make himself worthy of God's acceptance. In any case, Occamist theology, so far as it had already influenced the philosophy student, must have been translated by him in uncommon fashion into a personal concern, and thus we come once again into the personal realm.

Little as we can see plainly in details, or ever will see with perfect clarity, there must have taken place in Luther an inward religious struggle, hidden beneath the student gaiety that he had shared and with which once more he took leave of his friends before he actually went into the monastery.

If Luther wished to remain in Erfurt, which was manifestly the case — he apparently did not need to fear any accessory in some ugly secret — he had a choice among six monasteries. He selected the strictest, an Observant monastery of the Augustinian Hermits (see above, pages 28f.). There he was received as a novice, and turned over to the novice-master for monastic training. He could have withdrawn at any time during the year of his novitiate. Had he not stood the test and shown sufficient ascetic earnestness, he would have been dismissed. But he was retained, and at the end of his novice year he made his profession in 1506.

The order now assumed full control over Luther's future. Naturally he was required, especially during the novitiate, to perform menial services and occasionally go out begging. But this aspect has not infrequently been sharply exaggerated by the storytellers. That Luther was marked for ordination to the priesthood and for theological study was nothing uncommon or singular. The order

wanted to produce earnest priests and learned theologians, and obviously Luther's capacities were fully recognized. That the priestly duty of "changing the body of the Lord" on the altar greatly oppressed Luther within, that it was of prodigious significance to hold this body in his hands and to take it and distribute it, and that he feared he would commit a mortal sin by making an error in reciting the Mass, for example, even in his first celebration, is understandable. But one easily reads too much into the records of an extraordinary expression of fear. The inner bliss of having become a priest, of being deemed worthy of this holy service, Luther not only expressed to his father, who had come to the first Mass, but also actually felt. With the greatest conscientiousness from the time of his ordination by the Erfurt suffragan bishop, John of Laasphe, in the Erfurt cathedral on the fourth of April, 1507, and of his first Mass in the monastery church on the second of May, 1507, Luther offered the sacrifice of the Mass day by day and participated in the daily hours of prayer. The haggard figure of Luther and the bony face with which the pictures from the Wittenberg monastery period still portray him are expressions of the mortifications to which he devoted himself unreservedly. Many a week he made confession more than once. As an Observant monk, who had to keep his eyes always downcast, Luther dared not even look at a woman, and retained for a long time a reluctance to receive women at all for confession.

Naturally a priest of the order had to prepare theologically for his ordination. Above all, Luther had to study thoroughly Gabriel Biel's work on the canon of the Mass, that is, the prayers preceding the completion of the sacrifice of the Mass. A particular theological curriculum, however, was not a prerequisite for ordination, but could fol-

low the ordination. So it was for Luther: to study theology meant to work through a prescribed list of theological works. We know fairly accurately into what works Luther delved for the purpose, and we may assume that to a great extent he actually memorized them. Luther had a splendid memory, and in a time when the number of books to be read was considerably smaller than today, we may reckon quite generally on a word-for-word assimilation to a degree such as we no longer know. Luther certainly studied the following theological works thoroughly: the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, several commentaries thereon, namely, the so-called *Collectorium* of Gabriel Biel and the *Quaestiones* of William of Occam, and those of a theologian from the time of the Council of Constance, Pierre d'Ailly; then, for the exposition of Scripture, the *Glossa ordinaria,* ascribed to Walahfrid Strabo of the ninth century. All of these, as Catholic scholarship has strongly emphasized, are works of late nominalistic Scholasticism, apart from the last-named Biblical commentary, of course, and apart from the *Sentences* of the Bishop of Paris, Peter, called the Lombard, which were composed in the twelfth century before the rise of the great Scholastic school systems. But the *Sentences,* which were used everywhere for centuries as the dogmatic textbook, were known and thoroughly appropriated by Luther quite manifestly in a nominalist interpretation.

Nevertheless, the Catholic thesis — that Luther had no familiarity at all with the classical Catholicism of high Scholasticism but only with a caricature that is scarcely genuinely Catholic, namely, nominalism — will hardly do. On the one hand, nominalism to this day has not been condemned, however great a position of preeminence has been accorded to Thomas Aquinas; on the other hand, al-

though it is indeed uncertain whether Luther at that time could already have worked through the *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas, he did become familiar with Thomas and Duns Scotus and Alexander of Hales. His knowledge of Scholasticism was not and did not remain one-sidedly narrow.

With the study of books was connected the requirement that he hear lectures at the university and in the general school of the order in the monastery. In the lectures, however, books again were read aloud and occasionally interpolated with explanations. One more task did, or at least could, come into the picture for the theology student. If he had properly completed his study of the arts, he was graduated and became first a bachelor and then a master of arts. Thereby, however, he had the right to teach in the realm of the arts. He was an instructor in the one faculty and a student in the other. Luther made use of his teaching privilege during his years in the monastery. Indeed, as it worked out for him, the order abruptly transferred him to Wittenberg. Located there was a quite recently founded university in which the order had to supply several professorships. The young Luther at the age of twenty-five had to occupy a chair of moral philosophy in 1508, though only for a relatively short time. There he had to lecture on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle.

6. Duties in the Order and Trip to Rome

It will be proper now to narrate the life of the monk Luther down to the decisive break constituted by the indulgence controversy. It is quite possible, indeed probable, that the so-called "monastery struggles" that have so great an importance for Luther's inner development

were already long in progress when Luther moved from Erfurt to Wittenberg for the first time. One must soberly realize, however, that the almost innumerable attempts somehow to fix the time sequence of these monastery struggles, so that we can to our satisfaction identify with certainty the moment of Luther's conversion experience, are nothing but more or less ingenious hypotheses. Under the circumstances it is more sensible to elucidate the external events first and then examine Luther's inner development. The University of Wittenberg, so important for Luther, may be discussed when we come to his final transfer to that place.

A monk, even when he was engaged in advanced studies, had to discharge duties within the monastery or even duties of the order, and as a member of the cloister he also participated in its government. The duties could be of a minor nature, but also very extensive. At a time when Luther was especially burdened by his academic work, namely, when he was delivering his first great Biblical lectures in Wittenberg, he was very heavily weighed down with duties of the order, as subprior of the monastery, then as director of monastery studies and in addition as district vicar, which meant that he had oversight over eleven monasteries. In the time after 1508, Luther had to carry out a special commission of the order, to which he was assigned perhaps not altogether by chance: he had to travel to Rome on a matter of dispute within the order and submit it to the general prior of the order for decision. The details of this dispute are exceedingly obscure. How deeply Luther himself was involved in it, whether he was sent to Rome as the one responsible for settling the matter or only as traveling companion, what Luther's relation in this case was with his most important superior, Staupitz,

and other questions cannot be answered with certainty. Not even the time of the journey is established. Did it take place in the winter of 1510–1511 or not until the winter of 1511–1512? Certainly, Luther set out from Erfurt, whither he had been transferred again, and where now as a *sententiarius* he was lecturing in the theological faculty, namely expounding Lombard's *Sentences* (see above, page 44).

The situation in the order out of which the dispute had been conjured up was the following: There were four provinces of the Augustinian Hermits in Germany — the provinces of Rhineland-Swabia, Cologne, Saxony, and Bavaria. This division of the order was of a geographical nature. At the head of each province stood a provincial. The provincial was elected for a term of office, and could be reelected or replaced by another at the end of the term. For the Saxon province a certain Gerhard Hecker is known to have been the provincial for many years in Luther's time. A rather considerable number of the German Augustinian Hermit monasteries were Observant. The Observant cloisters, understandably, did not wish to stand under Conventual provincials, in which case their strict discipline might have been endangered. They had even succeeded in being placed under an Observant vicar of their own, so that they were entirely exempted from the provincial administration. The vicar of the Observance from 1503 to 1520 was a learned Saxon nobleman, John von Staupitz. The Observant monasteries were scattered all over Germany, and thus the Observance permeated all the German provinces of the order. Presumably in none of the provinces were men happy with the Observant monasteries. But the Observance was especially widespread in the Saxon province, so that the province had to regard itself

as a sort of emergency area. The idea of drawing the entire province of Saxony into the Observance was not altogether remote, and seemed realizable. In any case the thought occurred to Hecker to combine the office of Saxon provincial with that of Observant vicar. Staupitz was the ideal man for the double office, and a ruling to that effect was duly issued from Rome.

The matter was not without danger, for the Observants were mission-minded and wished to pursue their mission not only among the erstwhile Conventual monasteries in the Saxon province. Efforts to introduce the Observance into Swabia and Cologne were already in progress. What a grotesque situation would have developed if no longer simply the Observance itself but a geographically delineated province had currently attempted to extend itself into the other provinces? Town councils had gladly aided Observant cloisters, because their monks were not only beggars but learned theologians. They had encouraged and even demanded the exemption of their monasteries from the provincial administration. Would they now be prepared suddenly to submit their monasteries to the rule of an alien provincial? From the Nuremberg cloister arose resistance to Staupitz's union plans, and behind the resistance stood the Nuremberg town council. It was indeed a strange demand that the latter should suddenly be expected to deal with the Saxon provincial instead of the (properly responsible) Bavarian provincial to whom it belonged, but with whom it had so far had nothing to do. The plans could not be carried out. Staupitz eventually came to realize this too, and renounced them in 1512. Previously, however, the standpoint of the opponents was presented in Rome, by none other than Luther and his traveling companion (or vice versa). The opponents were

officially turned down in Rome, but Staupitz, as we have said, had to abandon his plan nonetheless.

In the last analysis, the practically useless journey to Rome had been undertaken primarily to enhance Staupitz's prestige. To be sure, he was then unable to take advantage of it. The journey, nevertheless, had a significance for Luther, even if not that which we might suppose. Luther did not become a fanatical adversary of the pope in Rome, and Luther's fight against the Antichrist in Rome does not stem from this journey. At least the trip to Rome did not help Luther to make the famous discovery of "righteousness by faith," even though his son Paul Luther told this story in 1582. Just as little, certainly, did Luther go to Rome or use his trip to Rome for the purpose of obtaining a dispensation from his monastic vows and permission to study in Rome for ten years in secular garb. This fantastic tale of the Hildesheim dean and former student of Luther, John Oldecop, has been warmed up once more in recent years by the aforementioned Romanist Franciscan scholar without producing even the slightest proofs for its authenticity. Luther had made general confession at a holy place; a desire of many faithful of that day was now fulfilled for Luther. He sought out the places of grace as much as possible, and acquired all the indulgences to be gained there. He also saw and heard unpleasant things, such as frivolous haste and cynical speech on the part of the priests celebrating Mass. On the journey in Italy, in south Germany, and in Switzerland his excellent gift of observation proved itself. Again and again in later times he came back to this or that detail which he had experienced on his trip to Rome. Then, when he stood in conflict with the papacy, many of these experiences in Rome came alive for him and helped to give color to his polemi-

cal speech. That he had acquired no genuinely positive impressions gave him assurance in his struggle against the corrupter of Christendom. To such an extent did his experiences in Rome, which he visited as a still faithful Catholic, and where he had made use of all the opportunities available to a faithful Catholic, prove serviceable and helpful. But the trip to Rome had no further importance for Luther's development as a reformer.

7. The Doctor and Professor of Bible

The controversy in the order was not ended with the delegation's return from Rome. The conflict seems to have had a double effect on Luther. On the one hand, there is much evidence that it did not seem expedient to leave him in Erfurt, because he apparently had gone to Rome to represent the interests of the refractory cloisters against Staupitz but then had gone over to Staupitz's side. On the other hand, it is clear that at this time he came closer to Staupitz, and Staupitz won from him the inner willingness — though from an outward point of view he had no choice but to obey — to go to Wittenberg and take over Staupitz's professorship of Bible. This means also that he had to obtain promotion to the rank of doctor of theology. The preparatory requirements were met, and Luther naturally was equal to the necessary theological disputation. Elector Frederick the Wise assumed the costs.

The University of Wittenberg, a creation of Frederick the Wise, was situated in a place that even according to current opinions, it seems, was scarcely altogether suitable and worthy. The town was dirty and small. The population probably did not number more than two thousand. A university had been needed in Electoral Saxony, because

in the partition of Saxony in 1485 the University of Leipzig had fallen to the Albertine line. Wittenberg offered the great advantage that a university could be erected cheaply there. There existed a collegiate foundation, All Saints, where Frederick's famous collection of relics was kept, the visiting of which brought much indulgence. The ten-year-old Wittenberg university did not yet, of course, have a tradition. Elector Frederick had brought scholars of rank and renown to Wittenberg, such as Valentine Polich of Mellerstadt, the jurist and physician, and Staupitz. The professorial chairs were established by making the incumbents canons of the foundation, which was richly endowed, for example, through the "incorporation" of wealthy church livings, a system whereby the canon received all the income except for a part that went to a meagerly paid vicar who actually administered the parish. Some of the professorships also were simply placed in the hands of the monastic orders represented in Wittenberg, and these included the position that Luther held in 1508–1509 in the faculty of arts, and the professorship in the theological faculty that Staupitz had occupied until 1512 and that now Luther took over. To a university that had yet to make a name for itself and could not offer outward attractions it would have been impractical to give an unduly uniform theological complexion. The diversity of the theological situation came to expression more strongly in Wittenberg than in the one-sidedly nominalist Erfurt. Luther's colleague Karlstadt was a Thomist, and so apparently was Staupitz, who was strongly influenced by German mysticism.

In Wittenberg, Luther delivered the early lectures that have lately become so renowned. We possess transcripts or manuscripts for lectures on The Psalms (*Dictata super*

Psalterium, 1513–1515), on the Epistle to the Romans (1515–1516), on Galatians (1516), and on Hebrews (1517). The next lectures fall into the period following the controversy over Luther's theses. Outwardly, Luther followed the customary pattern. Providing the students with texts having wide spaces between the lines, he dictated glosses, i.e., definitions, for the interlinear space and the margins, and then he offered substantial comments on larger passages, called scholia.

During his lectures Luther matured into a theologian of great repute within the order. One may well assume that his Augustinian brothers in Germany looked to him with a certain pride and expectation. One hardly needed to fancy him a dangerous critic of the church, although he frequently uttered frank comments about ecclesiastical abuses in the presence of the students. Thereby, however, he did not pass beyond customary bounds. Upon the students Luther seems to have exercised a strong drawing power. That Professor Luther of the young and rather obscure University of Wittenberg was already a German or European celebrity is simply out of the question.

More cannot be said at this point about Luther's early lectures. After their discovery they were at first regarded as the great testimonies of evangelical theology. The new Luther research, as we have said above, was kindled by them. Chiefly to the thorough study of Luther's early lectures do we owe our complete certainty today that the essence of the Lutheran Reformation lies not in the fight of Luther against the indulgence scandal and against the encroachments of Rome, but in the discovery of the new righteousness. Today, however, there has reappeared a strong inclination to see in the Luther of the early lectures no longer, indeed, the Catholic Luther — Karl August

Meissinger alone has maintained this in books appearing only a few years ago — but a Luther who had not yet altogether penetrated to the gospel, in other words, a developing reformer, and to assume that Luther made his great evangelical discovery only in 1518 or 1519. Under the circumstances it is most expedient to speak at this point about the inner development of Luther in the monastery, about his so-called " monastery struggles."

8. Struggles in the Monastery and the Tower Experience

Through the years of Luther's life in the monastery and his academic activity as a generally unknown professor — through all these years or beyond them as well? — stretched an oppressive experience that convulsed him to his inmost being. Roughly speaking, it is relatively easy to say what it was all about. The experience had both a destructive and a constructive side. Luther experienced a genuine inner breakdown; then he was helped to rise out of his inner catastrophe.

What was the nature of the breakdown? To be a monk meant to walk the way of perfection, that is, to do more than simply fulfill the commandments binding upon all men, and to observe the " evangelical counsels." The three monastic vows — poverty, chastity, and obedience to superiors — are a formal expression of the way by which it was believed one could more surely attain to salvation, through bodily renunciation and intensified piety, than the ordinary believer. The monk could expect even to feel perfection, insofar as it bestowed peace of conscience, inward repose, and assurance. No monk was without sin, for according to the age-old monastic tradition, it is precisely

the monk who not only avoids the sins of action but conscientiously examines the sins of his inner impulses. But he had the means of salvation in the sacraments, penance, and the Eucharistic sacrifice, and their regular use would necessarily bring peace to his conscience and inward assurance.

Luther did not attain to this experience of a pacified conscience. There is no evidence that he committed gross actual sins or fell prey to torturing sensual desire, but rather the reverse, even though such charges were often insinuated against Luther later by his adversaries. He felt that he was not perfect inwardly, because that which he regarded as the fundamental sin before God — namely, the desire to claim a status in the presence of God, arrogance and presumption, "incurvedness into himself" — Luther sensed within himself, indeed he saw it augmented by the monastic life. Out of this discovery about himself grew terrible anxieties for Luther. The thought tortured him that with this inner disposition he would never be able to stand before God.

Still more was involved in Luther's inner breakdown. The doctrine of predestination strongly influenced Luther's tribulations in the monastery. Luther was aware that there were some persons who by virtue of God's unfathomable counsel are destined for salvation and the others for reprobation. Tormented by an anxiety that at times positively crushed him, Luther felt that he might be among the rejected. Luther's anxiety was concerned with predestination. What he observed and perceived in himself seemed to him necessarily a sign that he was rejected. "My fears increased till sheer despair left naught but death to be my share; the pangs of hell I suffered" — these words from a hymn he composed much later, presumably in

1523, "Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice," refer to his fearful experience in his monastery period.

It is impossible to give a succinct, conclusive, all-clarifying explanation of this inner catastrophe of Luther. One has the easiest time of it if one views Luther as a medical, psychiatric case and Luther's monastic anxieties as the expression of a psychic abnormality. Those who would explain Luther in medical terms naturally lay great weight on the fact that Luther's *Anfechtungen* [his spiritual assaults] were not continuous; rather, as he clearly testifies, they overtook him from time to time and for very brief periods, but then mounted to horrible intensity. It should be clear, however, that the psychiatric interpreters and critics of Luther advance a religious prejudgment when they regard Luther's afflictions as an expression of psychical aberration. They presuppose that there is no judgment and no sentence passed upon men, pronouncing blessedness or damnation. But these notions concerning faith Luther shared with his times. It is only a question why in his case the thought of death and judgment led to this inner catastrophe. We may search for factors that had some influence upon Luther's breakdown. More we cannot claim. That Luther underwent these experiences is a unique, historical fact, which eludes final explanation. The explanation of God's personal guidance, which naturally is no "scientific" interpretation, remains for a Christian still the most illuminating and most natural explanation.

Of decisive importance, naturally, was Luther's monastic training. The monk was obliged through fulfilling the law, including that which was only counseled but which was undertaken by the monk as a duty, to seek perfection, to make use of the sacramental means of grace, and thereby

to attain at least to a relative assurance of his state of grace. It was a question, of course, how strictly one selected the moral standard with which to measure oneself.

For an understanding of Luther's highly intensified conscientiousness Occamism offers an explanation. If one maintains the Occamist conception of God, and not only does so theoretically but makes it a part of one's personal life and feeling, namely, the conception of the majestic God, the God who requires perfect "righteousness," one can or must fall into this terrible despair. Of course, Occamism also possessed a faith in the moral powers of man. Man must "do his best," or "do what is in him" (*facere quod in se est*), in order to become worthy of acceptance, and he can do much by his own powers — he can bring himself to perfect contrition over his sin and thereby prepare himself for grace and make himself worthy of acceptance. But what if experience testified against the success of this self-perfecting?

Luther's occupation with the theology of Augustine might also serve as an explanation. The keynote of the piety that Augustine taught was perfect love toward Him who is the supreme good. True, it was not customary to interpret Augustinian love to God in such a way that the entire life of the Christian must be a single unbroken chain of acts of love to God. Self-love was acknowledged as the presupposition of all existence, even of all Christian existence, and the occasional or perhaps the frequent eliciting of acts of love to God was regarded as sufficient. But who could stop a person with inner independence from thinking through the demand of perfect love to God all the way to its ultimate consequences? From Augustine the church had received the doctrine of predestination by the God who by a sovereign divine decree bestows irresistible

grace on some and destines them for salvation, while he leaves others to themselves and allows them to fall into destruction. Anxiety over predestination from the outset calls to mind Augustinian influences.

It is difficult, even with explanations that by no means explain everything but only succeed in clarifying certain relationships, to arrive at fully lucid conclusions, since we cannot learn clearly when Luther began to be so tormented and just as little when he began to become absorbed in Augustine. Marginal notes on works of Augustine in Luther's handwriting are extant from the year 1509. But this hardly advances our quest. One must be satisfied simply to state that Occamism and Augustine together played a part in Luther's breakdown. Not only Luther the Christian and monk but precisely also Luther the theologian fell into an inner catastrophe.

The salutary, saving experience of Luther consisted in his experiencing the grace of God, indeed, one might say, the awareness of being elected by God. He actually found the peace of a comforted conscience; he found the gracious God for whom he had struggled. It is indeed difficult to describe Luther's saving experience more clearly than this. It has been correctly seen, for example by Karl Holl, that Luther's experience of salvation cannot simply be reduced to the formula that he found Christ. Already in his spiritual tribulations Luther was very much engrossed with Christ. Just this was the terrifying thing, that in his tribulation even Christ suddenly meant nothing to him. Christ indeed was the judge, no matter how much every faithful man knew of Christ's mercy and kindness. So it became a torturing question for Luther whether Christ was gracious *to him*, and whether *he* would ultimately receive the benefit of Christ's atoning work, and whether *he* would be

able to stand before Christ in the judgment.

Luther's experience can hardly be reduced even to the simple formula of God's righteousness or the bestowed righteousness of God. It is well known that Luther himself used this formula from the time of his treatise on the *Bondage of the Will* (1525). In particular, he asserted in his memoir of his life in 1545 (see above, page 10) that at the decisive turning point of his life, when his wild and confused conscience was tamed and he felt himself reborn, entering through the opened gates into paradise, it came to him that the apostle meant by the "righteousness of God" in Rom. 1:17 the righteousness that God bestows. All earlier expositors except Augustine, Luther says at one place, interpreted it otherwise. That the latter assertion is not accurate has been proved by Luther's Catholic critics. Above all, indeed, Luther struggled unsuccessfully not only to produce evidence in himself, through a perfect life, of the required righteousness as God himself possesses it, but also to find in himself, in a sanctified life, the righteousness that God bestows. One must first interpret correctly how Luther understands this bestowed righteousness if one attempts to use this formula to explain his discovery.

The correct procedure will now be to ask first about the midwives who assisted at the new birth that Luther underwent. The expression "midwives" is used here intentionally. A birth does not take place by the cooperation of midwives, but is an event whose essential causes do not lie in the assistance given to the mother. We are not dealing with more than "midwifery" in what can be said in explanation of the change that took place in Luther. To give an account regarding the midwives, however, can elucidate the proceedings.

To begin with, Luther received human help. In every monastery, foresight was exercised that so-called "scrupulants" might receive aid. Scrupulants are persons suffering spiritual assaults, and Luther naturally was regarded and treated at first as a scrupulant. No doubt, the assaults experienced by scrupulants arose as a rule from anxiety at having forgotten a mortal sin in confession, and consequently having received no genuine forgiveness. It is quite understandable that Luther's preceptor in the monastery, or a good old man among the monks, as Melanchthon relates, impressed upon him the commandment to believe in the forgiveness promised to him. Since Luther's scruples, however, went much deeper, these counsels did not essentially help him advance on his way. Additional commandments, such as that he must believe in the forgiveness of sins, only increased still further the burden of a person who wanted to become perfect by the way of the law. What concerned him, on the other hand, was by no means that he had neglected something in relation to God, but that God had not elected him. There even existed a special literature for scrupulants. Jean Charlier, known as Gerson, had written at the beginning of the fifteenth century a counselor's handbook for monks who despaired of themselves. Luther, who despaired not of himself but of God, could not be decisively helped by it.

Much more effective and enduring than the help Luther received from any brother monks must have been the help given him by his superior in the order, John Staupitz. Throughout his life Luther acknowledged this help and retained a warm sense of gratitude, although Staupitz finally declined to follow Luther's way but died as Benedictine abbot of St. Peter's in Salzburg. Staupitz brought Luther to see that he must stop worrying further whether or

not he was predestined, but must simply look upon the wounds of Christ who died for us. Whether Staupitz maintained that predestination then would vanish, i.e., his preoccupation with the idea and his worry about being predestined, or whether he actually taught that in meditation on the wounds of Christ it is disclosed to the assailed soul that his assaults are signs of election, can no longer be positively ascertained from the various versions of a passage of the table talk that gives us an account of the help that Staupitz rendered to Luther.

It was hardly a single conversation with Staupitz that brought Luther to recovery. The entire influence of Staupitz must have turned out helpfully for Luther. But much more is involved here. In Staupitz, Luther encountered the world of German mysticism, the mysticism of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Luther's connection with Staupitz of itself raised the question whether the theology and piety of German mysticism helped Luther to escape his hideous feeling of spiritual torment. But altogether different circumstances also suggest inquiry into the influences of German mysticism upon Luther. Luther discovered a mystical treatise written by a Frankfurt priest of the Teutonic Order, the so-called *Deutsche Theologie* [*German Theology*]; having studied it thoroughly and almost swallowed it completely, he published it in abridged form in 1516 and complete in 1518. He also read Tauler's sermons, was strongly affected by them, and lauded Tauler as one of the greatest theologians who ever lived. Moreover, in Luther's early lectures, especially in the first one on The Psalms (*Dictata,* 1513–1515), the influence of mysticism is quite palpable.

In any case it is difficult to give a clear and satisfactory answer to the question of Luther's connections with German mysticism. Between monastic piety and German mysticism there exists an affinity, and in the case of very specific concepts, for example, humiliation, annihilation, mortification, one can hardly be sure whether one is dealing simply with the monastic terminology or with the influence of mysticism. Besides, Luther's reading of Tauler is not definitely attested until 1516. And finally, mysticism, even the so-called German mysticism, which comes from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, has features that lead so far astray from evangelical thinking that it is scarcely comprehensible how Luther could be so deeply influenced by it. He must have been simply blind to certain features of German mysticism such as its descents into pantheism. However, the views that the way of works does not lead to God but into vanity and self-complacency, and hence as far away from God as possible, but that the humility and abasement, the reduction to sheer insignificance before God, and thus the acknowledgment that to God alone belongs glory, indeed, the experience of God even to the pangs of hell, bring one in truth to heaven — these are the stock of mystical ideas which helped to shape Luther, became a part of him, and may have assisted at the new birth which he experienced.

All this becomes perfectly clear only when we observe the method of Scriptural interpretation that the young Luther used. What he read in the psalms he put into the mouth of Christ. All the sufferings of which the psalmists tell are Christ's sufferings. But these sufferings again are a model of the sufferings of the faithful. This exegesis is called *tropological.* Through the prayer of the psalmist and meditation upon the suffering of the praying poet the believer incorporates himself into the sufferings of Christ. And this faith in Jesus Christ, which can lead one even into

hell, is nevertheless the power that leads one out of hell.

In the same lectures on The Psalms in which we find these " mystical " ideas, Augustinian influences also are perceptible. Indeed, scholars have spoken of a Neoplatonism in the first Psalms lectures. Augustine, as is well known, was very strongly fructified by Neoplatonism, and his theology is one of the entrance gates whereby Neoplatonic ideas came into Christian thought. Thought patterns found in Luther, such as " the lower and the higher," " the earthly and the eternal world," etc., point to Augustine or even to Neoplatonism. However one may evaluate the thesis of a Neoplatonic-Augustinian element in the first Psalms lectures, at all events the question must be asked whether the theology of Augustine gave service as a midwife at Luther's rebirth. This was surely the case. As an Occamist, Luther grew up in a theological world that interpreted everything from the standpoint of God's will and judgment, both the sin of man and the grace that is granted him. Sin means essentially that God regards a man wrathfully, considers him a sinner, and grace means that God bestows on him His mercy which forgives him and despoils him of his good works. Good and evil are not attributes of man but judgments that God passes upon man. What man is, he is by virtue of God's judgment concerning him.

For the sinful man this could be dangerous. The man who is rejected in God's sight can perhaps be very meritorious morally and very successful apart from this judgment of God, but what he cannot do is fully attain the actual approval of the enigmatic God. To the same result came the Occamist view of man: if a man does what he can, " what is in him," i.e., develops all his good powers, if he makes use of grace, then God will surely change his judgment and bestow his mercy. In contrast to the Occamist conception of man under sin Luther developed an altogether different anthropology of his own. He has a completely unoccamist conception of sin. Sin is not only a judgment of God regarding man but a profound corruption, a frightful injury. That sin is so frightful a thing, fettering a man to selfishness, Luther experienced in his struggles in the monastery. But he could learn this also from Augustine, and certainly he understood it in this fashion as he wrestled with him. To this extent did Augustine participate in Luther's new birth.

In the strict sense, to be sure, Augustine participated in the destructive side of the process. The depth and the abyss of sin plunged Luther into despair, and did not actually help him at first. However, a recent interpreter of Augustine's predestination doctrine, Gotthard Nygren, has said very beautifully that its basic motif is the " omnipotence of grace." Luther too had sensed already that Augustine's doctrine of sin was related to the idea of omnipotent grace. The grace that God in Christ has prepared for the sinner then saved Luther from his anxieties. That Luther felt a great debt of gratitude to Augustine, he himself expressed with strong words. He claims to have learned, to his delight, that Augustine proclaims a " passive righteousness " of God, that is, a righteousness given by God, though, to be sure, he says that Augustine was not the first to teach him this. We must accept the fact that Luther regarded Augustine as one who assisted at his new birth. Of course, Luther must have understood and did understand Augustine differently from the manner in which we must understand him. The grace that Augustine taught is a miraculous power that works on a man and transforms him. If Luther had seen this with utter clarity, he would

have been hurled into new terrors precisely by Augustine, for Luther did not feel any such miraculous power as this in himself! Luther's experience was altogether different from Augustine's: Augustine came to feel a total transformation in himself, and praised the grace that had transformed him. Luther comforted himself with the grace of God, even though sin, incurvedness upon himself, self-seeking, still remained in him.

That Luther experienced grace in the midst of his sinful existence is related again to the fact that he was an Occamist. One may express the matter thus: with the help of Augustine he overcame his Occamism; nevertheless, he also interpreted Augustine in turn occamistically as far as grace is concerned, but not so far as sin is concerned.

We must now proceed a step farther and ask whether Luther also owed any gratitude to his Occamism for positive assistance at his new birth, namely, for the constructive side of his inner transformation. The Occamists found God's revelation in the Scriptures. Reason does not lead to God, but the positive revelation in the Word does. Occamism had already helped Luther to lay all emphasis on the Holy Scriptures. The chief aid in Luther's renewal was in point of fact the Holy Scriptures; mediately, however, there was also an assisting role that Luther's Occamism could fulfill for him.

Indeed, the fact is that Luther's study of the Scriptures and especially his study of Paul powerfully stimulated him and led him decisively forward, and finally brought him to the crisis. In Luther's lectures on Romans, delivered in 1515–1516, we surely find the strongest evidence of Luther's great experience. For this experience quite certainly, the seventh chapter of Romans held a special importance in the manner in which he and many before him, as early

as the ancient period, understood it. There Paul speaks, though recent expositors interpret the chapter altogether differently, of the "old man" within him who is subject to the law, wants to obey it, but cannot master it, and who still feels sin within, actually increased by the law. And he speaks of the "new man," on whom is bestowed the Spirit of God. Both the old and the new man are simultaneously present in him. In his struggle with Rom., ch. 7, Luther coined the remarkable, widely controversial, but for him uniquely significant formula, *simul justus—simul peccator,* "simultaneously righteous and sinner." The Christian is a sinner in reality and righteous in faith, through the grace of God, the *favor Dei.* The great consolation and the saving help for Luther, therefore, was the forgiveness of God, which already was working upon him and helping him to make progress, hence does not leave him completely caught in sin. But God's forgiveness does not alter the fact that sin still remains in him and still actually causes him to be condemned. The condemnation is removed, however, by God's act of forgiving the sinner and accepting him as righteous. Grace, if we may express it so, is still understood in an Occamist way, as a judgment that God in his gracious disposition pronounces upon a man. Faith humbly appropriates this promise of the grace of God. To put it another way: the work of mercy that God has accomplished in Christ, outside the believer, has saved him, made him free and of good cheer, and assured him that he has a gracious God.

But when did all this happen? When did the fearful anguish begin? Above all, when did the breakthrough take place and Luther find the gracious God? Luther himself made two explicit assertions: on the one hand, that the great discovery dawned upon him as he pondered the pas-

sage Rom. 1:16-17 (according to his now famous translation: " I am not ashamed of the gospel concerning Christ, for it is the power of God which saves all who believe in it, the Jews first, and also the Greeks. For therein is revealed the righteousness which avails before God, which comes from faith to faith; as it is written: 'The righteous will live by his faith' "; reference to Hab. 2:4). On the other hand, he stated that the new understanding came to him when he lectured on The Psalms for the second time, i.e., in the year 1518 or 1519 (*Operationes in Psalmos*). Against the second assertion a loud objection has been raised: That is utterly impossible! The new understanding of grace must have been present much earlier. At least as early as his lectures on Romans!

Now, Luther has even specified the location of the great experience. According to his table talk, he had the experience in the tower of the monastery: accordingly it is commonly referred to as the " tower experience." It is strange, however, that an experience which made so lasting an impression left no trace in his lectures! At Rom. 1:16-17 in the Romans lectures there is no evidence of it. It has been asserted that already in the first course of lectures on The Psalms, five years before the second, Luther shows his new understanding of the righteousness of God, at Ps. 31 (Vulgate 30) or Ps. 71 (Vulgate 70). Older scholars have even shifted the experience to the period 1508 to 1511. If Staupitz played an important role, one might actually think of the time when Luther had come very close to Staupitz personally, and that would mean this period. Today, however, there is a tendency to credit Luther's identification of 1518 or 1519 as the time of the experience, although it is not even altogether certain whether Luther really intends this in the passage where he seems to say it,

in his brief autobiography of 1545 (Preface to his Collected Latin Works). Meanwhile, the Hebrews lectures of 1517 must stand as a clear testimony of the fact that Luther had already attained a genuine assurance of salvation!

We are reduced to the sober acknowledgment that we cannot set up a calendar of Luther's inner development. We must let the matter rest by pointing out the relationships as we sought to describe them. It must also remain clear that all references to midwives mean nothing more than just that. An actual explanation of the process is not possible, for the process after all was by no means a new theoretical understanding of God but an encounter with God, a transformation not in theological terminology but in his attitude toward God. Not even this description perfectly reproduces Luther's self-evaluation: it was not that he changed his attitude toward God, but God changed his toward him. To put it most prosaically, the originality of Luther is not depreciated by all the evidence of influences upon Luther from the theology that he had absorbed and reworked in his own mind. But it is quite certain that Luther's development into a reformer came out of his monastery struggles and not out of the offense that he took at abuses in church practices. Not Luther the critic of the church but Luther the monk and exegete and preacher discovered the gospel; it was rather the new gospel that moved Luther to become a critic of the church. Luther's collision with the church came about because with this gospel he could break into this church, and in the end he had to burst it open. But he did not find the whole church willing to give it a hearing, and to this gospel he could not bring the whole church back.

III

Luther's Breakthrough

9. Indulgence Controversy and Proceedings Against the Heretic

Everyone who arrives at a new understanding must inevitably wrestle with those who have not yet attained or never attain this understanding. And if the new understanding originates only out of a certain positive standpoint, in Luther's case ultimately out of his Biblical study, it must nevertheless be defended against those who with their principles stand in the way of this understanding and attempt to obscure it. Luther found many errors concerning grace and faith and justification in the theologians before him, especially those of the Middle Ages, that is, the Scholastics. The means by which a person ordinarily proclaimed his disagreement with erroneous opinions and at the same time formulated precisely his own new clear conceptions was still in Luther's time the academic disputation. One drew up a series of propositions or theses, some of which were stated positively and others negatively, and challenged all who wished to oppose these propositions, and then defended them in debate. On occasion the teacher drew up the propositions and had a student defend them. In the year 1517 Luther formulated, quite sharply and solidly, some *Theses Against Scholastic Theology* and

directed a student, Francis Günther, to defend them. The affair looked almost dangerous. Conflicts with the church were altogether possible. Actually, nothing happened. A few weeks later Luther once again formulated theses for debate that were much more harmless. But they concerned a subject that was definitely no purely academic matter, namely, indulgences. Indulgences were being hawked in the churches or even in the marketplaces and the streets, and indulgence letters were being sold to the people, whereas Scholastic theology did not reach the people. However, if someone within the confines of the university wished to dispute about indulgences, it was from a theological point of view nothing particularly exciting. Popular though indulgences were, the questions concerning them were by no means theoretically clarified. It was the perfect right of every theologian still to hold his own opinion of them. But out of the controversy over the seemingly innocuous question of indulgences did Luther's reformation finally proceed.

What was really involved in an indulgence? Not a sale of the forgiveness of sins for money. To be sure, unbelievable things were said during the promotion by the "indulgence sellers," one of whom, the Dominican monk John Tetzel from the Leipzig monastery of St. Paul, operated in the vicinity of Wittenberg in Jüterbog, which still belonged to Brandenburg; he was not permitted to enter Electoral Saxony. Consequently, the common man may actually have thought that he could purchase the forgiveness of sins. As a matter of fact, Roman Catholic dogmatics distinguishes between the forgiveness of sins, through which eternal damnation naturally is excluded on account of the forgiven sins, and the remission of temporal penalties. The sin is forgiven in private confession, through absolution;

temporal penalties must be expiated through penances, which the priest imposes in the confessional, and perhaps also through painful experiences of life and subsequently in purgatory. "Temporal" here means "of limited duration," not "earthly."

That God punishes at all after he has forgiven, however, has been widely declared by Protestant theologians and laymen of recent times to be preposterous. However, that a lascivious sinner who has contracted a serious bodily affliction through his licentiousness is not healed of his illness immediately upon receiving forgiveness is a fact of experience, and against the distinction between forgiveness of guilt and possible remission of penalty little objection can be made. That God regards churchly punishments as his own punishments is quite another story.

Indulgence in the proper sense has to do only with the remission of punishment, and is basically a commutation of one penalty by another. In the Middle Ages when a person committed manslaughter, he might be required to perform a lengthy penance of fasting for it. If he enlisted in a Crusade, this could substitute for the penance of fasting — thus a knightly penance in place of the ordinary, degrading penance! Monetary payments then arose as a substitute. Finally it became customary to attach indulgences to particular times and places. In the so-called jubilee years, which were instituted after the Crusades had come to an end, one could make a pilgrimage to Rome and acquire pardon there, and so forth. But even the journey to Rome soon could be commuted for money.

When Luther published his Ninety-five Theses against indulgences, he by no means attacked the right of the church to convert the penalties that it had imposed into other ones. To be sure, he expressed his surprise that so

rich a person as the pope represented the matter as if he were remitting penalties and yet accepted payment for the pardon instead of giving it freely, and he also pilloried the scandal of the indulgence trade. The difficulty arose from the fact that in the last analysis indulgences still had something to do with the forgiveness of sins, and not solely with the remission of penalties. The indulgence letters at the same time gave one permission to choose any priest he pleased for making confession, even in the case of very grave sins that ordinarily could not be absolved simply by the local priest. Thus the indulgence letters promised remission "from guilt and penalty," and the required confession whereby one obtained the remission of guilt became practically a mere formality. Nevertheless, if these things were interpreted with a good will, they seemed clear. The second difficulty consisted in the fact that not only one's own penalties but even the penalties of purgatory could be redeemed by money. According to a bull of Pope Sixtus IV in 1477 one could pay money and thus benefit people long dead by shortening their time in purgatory or even releasing them from purgatory. Naturally, a confession in such a case was no longer possible, and one even had no assurance that the person concerned still remained in purgatory but had not, instead, gone straight to hell.

In the end, Luther had simply declared in his theses that the church can remit or commute only penalties that it has itself imposed, but not those which God has imposed. Thus he left the indulgence as such unimpugned, and only limited it in its significance. Nevertheless, more was involved in Luther's theses than this narrowing of the indulgence and the fight against the conditions surrounding the indulgence trade in general and the terms of the par-

ticular indulgence then current. The indulgence against which Luther fought had been published in 1506 and renewed in 1514 for the purpose of rebuilding St. Peter's Church in Rome. A percentage, however, went to Archbishop Albert of Hohenzollern, who needed help to raise an enormous sum for the Curia that he had to pay on account of his pluralism — the archbishopric of Mainz, bishopric of Magdeburg, and the administration of Halberstadt. A percentage went to the banking house of Fugger, which had advanced the money and acted as financial agent for the indulgence trade, and a percentage to Tetzel, and so forth. Luther was not even aware of these ramifications, and did not by any means investigate what lay behind the scene. Rather, instead of dealing only with the limitation of indulgences, Luther was calling into question the indulgence in its very essence: to seek indulgences means to evade one's punishment, whereas the truly penitent sinner precisely seeks it (Thesis 40). Luther assailed the assertion that the treasure of the church, upon which the pope can draw and make good the defective works of the faithful, consists of the merits of Christ and of the saints! Luther declared further that there were much greater and more essential gifts that the church distributes than indulgences. The famous Sixty-second Thesis reads: "The true treasure of the church is the holy gospel of the glory and grace of God." Thereby it became sufficiently clear that the Luther of the indulgence controversy could not disavow all that had engrossed his inmost thoughts through long years, namely, that the way to God and to peace with God and to salvation consists not in the performance of deeds, the doing of works, the presentation of merits, whether the merits are one's own or someone else's, but rather in the penitent sinner's believing and accepting the gospel. Moreover, that repentance is something entirely different from that which takes place in the sacrament of penance, something which belongs to the entire Christian life, is already expressed in the First Thesis: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of the Christian to be one of repentance." In brief, the theses debate a theological question that still was under real discussion, and on the surface they contain no sensational new message. But through them clearly gleams a gospel such as the church had not been proclaiming before.

Through these theses Luther became famous, and the day preceding All Saints' Day, 1517, on which considerable indulgence could be obtained in the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg itself, now is celebrated as the day of the German Reformation, the 31st of October, 1517. No one answered the challenge for debate. Within two weeks, however, the theses were known throughout Germany, and they caused an enormous sensation. They gave the impetus that finally led to Luther's condemnation as a heretic, banned by the church and outlawed by the empire. First they led to the heresy proceedings against Luther, which were instituted twice. The first indictment, in June, 1518, spoke of the dissemination of suspect doctrines and the suspicion of heresy; and the second, the so-called "summary proceeding" in August, 1518, spoke of notorious heresy. The action naturally was instituted from Rome because denunciations against Luther had been received from Germany. Luther's bishop, Jerome Schultz, proceeded most cautiously. Albert of Brandenburg was not only the head of the ecclesiastical province to which Luther's diocese belonged but also the man most personally affected by the Luther affair, inasmuch as he profited

considerably from the indulgence and he had composed the official instructions according to which the indulgence was being promoted. Albert acted much more energetically and submitted a formal complaint. But beyond looking out for his own reputation, he did virtually nothing. The real agitators were the Dominicans to whom Tetzel belonged.

Throughout the indulgence controversy, which dragged out until Luther was excommunicated, i.e., to the beginning of 1521, more was involved than simply the Ninety-five Theses. Although the disputation to which Luther aspired by posting the theses never took place, a literary controversy did ensue. The countertheses drawn up at Tetzel's request by a professor from Frankfurt on the Oder, Conrad Koch, known as Wimpina, and defended by Tetzel at the chapter of his order in Frankfurt, had no further result. They only gave Luther the occasion to discuss the subject of indulgences in detail once more, in a German *Treatise on Indulgence and Grace.* A second polemical pamphlet of Luther on the subject, the Latin *Explanations of the Disputation on the Value of Indulgences* (*Resolutiones*), which appeared in August, 1518, was dedicated to Pope Leo X and sent to him as early as May; it already indicated resistance to the demanded recantation.

A theologian who was not unknown to Luther, one with whom Luther had had friendly relations for some time, Dr. John Eck, of Ingolstadt, had started a personal controversy with Luther. The first exchange was circulated only in handwritten copies (*Asterisks* and *Obelisks* — meaning "notes" and "miscellanies"). Very quickly, as is well known, Eck became a vehement theological adversary of Luther. At the Curia an official document was produced, actually by the pope's theological expert, the so-called Master of the Sacred Palace. This was always a Dominican, and the current incumbent of the office was Silvester Mazzolini Prierias. The essential feature about this literary controversy was that Luther was advancing more and more boldly beyond his original positions. Eck in particular became dangerous for Luther in that he was pursuing a definite plan to force Luther into ever more extreme "heretical" expressions. Thus the controversy that began with Luther's theological critique of indulgences developed into a violent attack by Luther against the entire Roman ecclesiastical system and, as we shall explain, actually against Roman dogma.

10. The Battle with Rome

When a person openly and stoutly infringes church discipline or violates church doctrine, and incurs the charge of "notorious heresy," Rome does not as a rule argue with him for four years and give him four years' time to disseminate his teaching, least of all when the person proceeds with so intense a human passion as we have seen Luther did. For the opportunity Luther received of nearly four years to make an assault on the church of his day and to kindle a movement that could only be interpreted as a revolution against the church, political events were responsible. These events in a unique way enabled Luther's seed to sprout and grow.

The critical problem was the succession of Emperor Maximilian, which was under discussion even before his death on January 12, 1519. There were two leading candidates, Charles of Ghent, Archduke of Austria, sovereign of the Spanish lands, Duke of Burgundy, etc., and King

Francis I of France. Both exerted themselves with every possible means, especially with money, to influence the electors who had to choose the next emperor. The Curia in Rome was most vitally interested in the imperial question; if Hapsburg possessed both northern and southern Italy in peace, the Curia could be squeezed and eliminated as a potential power in Europe. Therefore it worked on the electors as energetically as the aspirants themselves. It was not that Luther had to be spared; he was an insignificant mendicant monk and no factor in politics. But Frederick the Wise of Saxony had to be handled with extreme care. For reasons the complete elucidation of which belongs to the most difficult problems of Reformation history, he stubbornly refused to deliver his professor for execution, and although to his end he did not openly join Luther's side, in effect he actually shielded him. He succeeded in arranging for Luther to be heard in Germany, at the Diet at Augsburg in October, 1518, instead of being forced to make the demanded journey to Rome. Nothing came of the hearing. The great Thomist theologian Cajetan was unable to wring from Luther the recantation he demanded. By an almost unworthy method, the use of a diplomat of the lowest rank, Charles von Miltitz, the Curia brought Luther to a temporary silence, and at least for a time succeeded in halting not only the official proceedings in the Luther case but also their further advance. It was unable, and perhaps even unwilling, to prevent its most faithful champion in Germany — to such a station had Eck of Ingolstadt already risen — from prematurely reviving the controversy with Luther through the Leipzig Disputation, in June and July, 1519. Eck then succeeded also in having a threat of excommunication duly issued against Luther in the very year in which the

newly elected Emperor Charles V made his first appearance in Germany (the famous "bull of excommunication," *Exsurge Domine,* of June 15, 1520, was really only a threat of excommunication), and succeeded in having the papal nuncio Jerome Aleander bring with him to the Diet at Worms the actual bull of excommunication, *Decet pontificem Romanum,* of January 3, 1521.

Just what were the steps by which the dispute over the question of indulgences developed into a battle between Luther and the existing church, indeed, a violent assault upon the Roman Catholic system and its dogma? The affair is complicated by a plethora of problems and difficulties, as one might expect in advance. In the indulgence question, Luther can hardly be seriously charged with having violated a formulated dogma. An actual dogma of indulgences simply did not exist. Furthermore, not even in the controversy over faith and good works, grace and man's free will, justification and the Christian life, could Luther violate a dogma. The dogmas connected with men's salvation — salvation in general through the cross of Christ and in particular through the "justification" of individual Christians — were formulated by the Council of Trent, after Luther's death, under the influence of the Reformation. Apart from the so-called ancient dogma — the doctrines of the divine Trinity and of the two natures of Christ — which Luther in fact never assailed, only the teaching of the sacraments came in question for open assault upon the dogma of the church. The controversy, however, did not break out with an attack of Luther upon the doctrine of the sacraments. The conflict began over the doctrine of the power of the pope and that of the church in general. These doctrines had by no means been fully developed or even declared formal dogma by this time.

Precisely in the realm of papal power, as is well known, the essential decisions were laid down only in 1870 by the Vatican Council. But just over this point the official church was extremely sensitive, and it did have a dogma here even if it had not yet duly formulated it.

Not as an independent theme had Luther raised the problems of the power of the pope. He had broached it already in the theses on indulgences, without saying much about it explicitly. In the great conflict, literary and legal, that was set off by the indulgence theses, the question pushed more and more insistently into the foregound. Has the pope power over the treasure of the merits of Christ and the saints? This proposition was pursued further in the discussions and theses, for example, in the *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses*. Whenever Luther touches it again, he also denies — in consequence of his recognition that there are no merits at all before God — that there are merits of the saints which can be applied to others. But then he is saying, above all, that the pope has absolutely no power over souls. Luther takes the liberty of going even farther. In doing so he seems to be totally unaware of what an enormous assertion he is making. There was a period, he declares, perhaps six hundred years, when the Roman Church by no means stood above other churches, in any case not above the churches of Greece. Luther attacks the doctrine of the " two swords," viz., that the dominion over the world and the dominion over souls belong to the pope, but in such a way that the pope normally confers the dominion over the world upon others, the temporal sovereigns, and allows it to be exercised by them. The pope is not infallible. Indeed, in the aforementioned Leipzig Disputation, June 27 to July 16, 1519, as is well known, Luther let himself be driven by

Eck to assert even the fallibility of councils. Thereby Luther in a certain sense was espousing the position of Hus and the Bohemians, and thus taking the side of a condemned and proscribed heretic. The unsurpassable zenith of Luther's critique of the papacy and the dominant church was reached with the burning of the bull threatening excommunication, and of the books of canon law on December 10, 1520, outside the Elster gate in Wittenberg.

The second question that inevitably aroused controversy was the question of the sacraments. It too broached with the Ninety-five Theses, for the focus of that document was repentance, and penance is one of the seven sacraments. The very first thesis signified a questioning and depreciation of sacramental repentance. He who formulated this thesis, once he thought the matter through, once his thought had developed clearly, had to end by deleting penance from the list of the sacraments. This very sacrament of penance also makes it clear that the question of the pope is inseparably bound up with the question of the sacraments. The sacraments in themselves are not dispensed by the pope as pope, but every priest administers four sacraments; two are reserved for the bishop, and only one do laymen administer to one another, i.e., marriage. In penance, however, the pope has certain cases reserved for his jurisdiction; from certain sins he alone can loose one (reservations), and in certain instances, he alone applies the key of binding (the banning of a notorious heretic). In penance it also becomes clear that the question of the sacraments in general is connected with the question concerning the church. What does the ban mean if the church imposes it unjustly? The true church, after all, is no " visible " community, whose members can be numbered or identified. The true church consists of the " invisible "

community of all believers in Christ, and unbelief alone excludes one from it. In expectation of his excommunication Luther developed an altogether uncatholic doctrine of the church, for example, in the treatise against the Leipzig Franciscan Augustine Alveld, *On the Papacy at Rome, Against the Celebrated Romanist at Leipzig,* 1520. That the church has unjustly withdrawn the cup from the laity comes out almost as an incidental opinion of Luther, but it has an alarming effect that Luther appropriates a Hussite slogan. Duke George of Saxony, the grandson of the Hussite king, had already taken offense from a sermon illustration of Luther's that hinted of a Hussite tendency.

Luther opened his great assault against the Catholic sacrament dogma with his Latin treatise, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,* 1520. That in it he rejected the Catholic view that there are seven sacraments was from his standpoint an external matter; for the church it was important, because the numbering of the sacraments as seven had actually been made a matter of dogma in 1439. That the Mass is no sacrifice was the chief blow to the Roman understanding of the sacraments. The learned theologians, all the way to King Henry VIII of England, who had once studied theology, saw clearly that the treatise on " the Babylonian Captivity of the Church " signified Luther's actual abandonment of Rome and was his most dangerous writing.

Of almost negligible significance, on the other hand, seems to be the treatise that probably was the most widely read in subsequent days and that was often regarded as the most important of all, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate,* 1520. The weighty attacks against the bloodsucking character of the Roman financial system and against a

plethora of abominable church practices impress one again and again. But many persons in Luther's time could and did write just this kind of thing. The very stern " Grievances of the German Nation " had been submitted to many imperial diets (see above, page 21), and no other than Luther's enemy, George of Saxony, was one of their most energetic exponents. In any case, the address to the nobility also contains weighty statements on the questions of the church and the papacy. No pope and no ecclesiastical teaching office has a monopoly of interpreting the Holy Scriptures, but every man can interpret the Holy Scriptures; not only the pope can summon a council, but for instance, also the civil authority; it is not true that the spiritual power is superior to the civil. These are the celebrated " walls of the Romanists " which must be broken down, and the assault upon them is not only against ecclesiastical abuses but against the foundation of the church. Over and above this, the treatise contains a bluntly anti-Catholic program of church reform.

Thus Luther came into a terrible and perhaps irreconcilable conflict with the church of his time, through assaults on the power of the pope and on the doctrine of the sacraments. Connected with papal power is the power of the priests; Luther declares that all so-called power in the church is service, and dare be nothing else.

11. The Conquest of Hearts

But then, was Luther's great discovery regarding sin and grace and justification not essentially involved in his assault upon Rome? Did the battle with Rome obscure the great experience of grace that he had had in his monastery struggles? Not so. If one closely examines Luther's

new conception of the church and the sacraments, one observes that ultimately it is altogether and entirely a question of grace and faith and justification. Luther did not wage his fight against the Roman sacramental doctrine as a fight against a magical conception of the sacraments, to which he and his times had considered themselves superior. That would be an Enlightenment attitude, not a Lutheran one. The fight against priestly power was not a fight by which mankind was to be liberated from ecclesiastical control. This again would be an Enlightenment attitude, not a Lutheran one. The new doctrine of the sacraments makes it clear that the sacraments can be nothing else than the word and sign of the mercy of God bestowed in Christ. What is at stake in the new understanding of repentance is that only the gospel of the grace and glory of God frees us from sin. The new understanding of the church is founded entirely upon faith. One could continue this analysis still further.

In a quite explicit way, moreover, Luther used his justification doctrine in the fight against Rome during the great period of controversy. A tiny document from the year 1518, the theses for the Heidelberg Disputation, prepared for the convention of Luther's order, which in April, 1518, had to take a stand on the Luther affair, has been justly regarded as one of the most precious testimonies of Luther from the period of the indulgence controversy. Here, for example, Luther's understanding of sin becomes clear: all the good works a man does, since they are testimonies of his self-seeking, are mortal sins. Thereby we are dealing with Luther's doctrine of justification. It comes to beautiful expression here also that Luther's justification theology is a theology of the self-sacrificial love of God, a love that man meets at the foot of the cross.

Hence, true theology is named "theology of the cross." Luther's treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian Man,* 1520, in its German and its Latin form, treats of the freedom that the justified man has through faith and that is at the same time service to his neighbor.

Luther's doctrine of justification by the forgiving grace of God also provided the occasion for the papal polemic against Luther and his entire reformation. It has been interpreted as if Luther wished to make all good works superfluous and unnecessary. A storm and a full-scale drive against Luther were launched under the slogan that Luther demolishes all Christian morality with his doctrine of justification by faith alone in the grace of God in Christ. The rumor that Luther teaches a licentious, swinish life was spread in every street, and appears in the Edict of Worms with which Luther was condemned by the German Empire! One of the noblest writings of Luther, the *Treatise on Good Works,* also written and published in 1520, strikes back at this interpretation of his justification doctrine and at the propaganda being sent out to mobilize all moral instincts against Luther. There was an element of truth in the matter, inasmuch as immature persons could actually take Luther's teaching as an occasion for dissoluteness. But Luther was able to say clearly, if not sufficiently to convince all those who were hostile toward him, that (as he once expressed it later) faith is a living, busy thing that cannot help doing good without ceasing.

While this very doctrine of justification formed the basis of Luther's fight against Rome and stimulated the church's counterattack against him, it was precisely this Luther of the gospel of justifying grace who gained popularity, won the hearts of countless Germans, and exerted an influence far beyond the boundaries of Germany. On the whole, it

must be duly asserted that Luther found a response in a well-nigh unimaginable manner. His name was on every man's lips. His writings, at any rate from 1520 on, were known to the educated throughout the world, and Luther's adherents gathered everywhere. Preachers who preached " the gospel " arose in every city of consequence and even in villages. It was widely regarded as self-evident that what Luther had to proclaim was " the gospel " or " the Word of God." Where Luther's influence established itself it was declared that from now on " God's Word " was to be preached. The celebration of the Lord's Supper with both bread and wine, and the introduction of various other changes, took place in the course of time. As long as Luther was working without hindrance, practically no one thought of a methodical reorganization of the church. What Luther had released was an evangelical " Storm and Stress " that as yet could not be compressed into new forms, but shattered innumerable old ones.

Many felt and said aloud that it was unheard of for a wretched mendicant monk to be cited to a German imperial diet and to be presented to a Roman cardinal, and an unprecedented audacity that the ridiculous monk, far from recanting without ado, dared to insist on an argument. That Frederick the Wise could risk all suggesting or demanding the appearance of his professor in the monk's cowl at Worms before emperor and empire, and that the imperial herald Caspar Sturm was assigned the ceremonial task of inducting a medicant monk into the presence of the German estates and the emperor, was from the viewpoint of the medieval world an incomparably grotesque situation. That Luther dared to make a speech before the assembled diet — indeed, that he not only needed but also succeeded in extorting, as it were, the right to do so by

means of the well-known and so often misinterpreted request for time to ponder — sounds like a fairytale, and made just that impression on man's souls. It becomes comprehensible only if one realizes that actually the whole world was fascinated by this strange monk, and not only in a superficial way: his preaching and teaching had penetrated deep into men's hearts. The medicant professor from the shabby, fledgling, and on the whole completely insignificant, small-town university in one of the most miserable mudholes in Germany had become the focus of German thinking, not, to be sure, because he embodied the spirit of the times in a particularly concentrated way but because he gave a new answer to medieval questions about faith, and in general had something to say only to those who wished to believe the gospel.

12. Confession Before Emperor and Empire

Luther had been threatened with the ban in the middle of the year 1520. In the bull threatening excommunication forty-one statements had been gathered from Luther's writings. These can scarcely be said to misrepresent Luther's intention as if he had not so formulated them, or as if they had been torn out of context in such a way as to acquire an entirely different meaning. Nevertheless, out of Luther's writings had been one-sidedly collected material relating to papal power and to the understanding of the sacraments. A sacrament was so interpreted that it was connected with faith in the Word that assures us of God's forgiving grace; in other words, the effectiveness of the sacraments is not guaranteed through the performance of the act by the priest, but comes about only in faith. A genuine comprehension of that for which Luther was

mainly concerned does not come to light in the forty-one statements of the bull threatening excommunication. A single one points to Luther's great doctrine of justification by faith: grave reproach is cast upon Luther for disavowing man's free will in the acquisition of salvation. Eck had negotiated the composition of the bull in Rome, and he along with the nuncio Aleander was commissioned to publish it in Germany — a task carried out only in the face of enormous resistance. Around the bull raged a literary war in which Luther more than once took up his pen. It now became clear that Luther would not offer the recantation required of him within sixty days. One could therefore have reckoned confidently on the excommunication even if Luther had not defiantly burned a printed copy of the bull. The ban was duly pronounced (see above, pages 76 f.). According to a three-hundred-year-old law of the empire, the imperial banishment had to follow without delay. It had to be pronounced at the next diet, which was summoned for the beginning of the year 1521 in Worms, and at which the new emperor was expected. Frederick the Wise, who was scarcely a convinced Lutheran yet, and who in any case by no means represented himself as such in public and who even to his death avoided all personal intercourse with Luther, unswervingly maintained the position that Luther had not been duly heard and overcome with reason. He demanded that until such a hearing was arranged Luther should not be condemned. A dreadful battle of intrigue ensued over the citation of Luther to Worms. Even after Luther had begun his journey, there were efforts to divert him from proceeding to Worms and to persuade him to clarify matters in a colloquy before a narrower circle at the Ebernburg castle under the protection of Sickingen. As everyone knows, however, Luther did appear in Worms, and he succeeded in speaking at length, contrary to the plan of the diet. Indeed, after Luther's public appearance at the diet there were exhaustive efforts to settle the affair with him in private conferences. Subjection to the decision of the empire was demanded. He was willing to pledge this, but only if the Holy Scriptures were the judge and norm.

What took place at the Diet at Worms in April, 1521, has stamped itself deeply upon the memory of the German people. What has been fabricated around the actual events is almost as interesting as that which actually occurred. Whether Luther said, " Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise," is by no means certain. He did stand, however; he did acknowledge his books, he also begged pardon for unnecessary vehemence, but he refused to recant as long as he was not convinced of error by Holy Scripture and clear arguments of reason. The result of the hearing and of the whole treatment of the Luther affair at the diet was the Edict of Worms. Luther was placed under the banishment of the empire, along with all his adherents. No man dared offer him shelter, food, and drink. Over the question whether and how the Edict of Worms could be carried into effect, men disputed and argued inconclusively for a decade and even longer. Of special consequence was the fact that not only was the official decree of banishment issued (though its promulgation is not above criticism) but also that the emperor himself issued a special declaration that he would stake body and life, dominion, and everything on liberating Germany from the Lutheran heresy. That was a binding promise for an emperor. Charles V spared no efforts to make the promise good. That he did not succeed was due to the international political complications and conflicts described earlier. As a

man of honor, Charles finally came to the conclusion that he was unable to fulfill his pledge. He laid down his crown in 1556, and spent his last two years in a monastery in continual devotion before the sacrament.

But we are still at Worms in the year 1521. According to the traditional views the Worms Edict inevitably meant the end of the Luther affair. Luther was finished. It must have seemed completely senseless for anyone still to take Luther's part.

13. Quiet and Composure at the Wartburg

Luther's period in the Wartburg charms one like a sort of idyll and has moved many a heart. Luther's abduction and removal to the Wartburg was less dramatic than is often represented. The arrangement that Luther should be taken into a kind of protective custody and kept out of hostile reach had been made between Frederick the Wise and his counselors. The old fox did not want to be told where Luther was being kept in order that he might be able to avow with a clear conscience that he knew nothing of Luther's whereabouts. Luther himself was let in on the secret, and his friends received the news remarkably soon. It was less a question of keeping Luther absolutely hidden than of eliminating all possibilities of abruptly offering an occasion for proceedings against Frederick the Wise as Luther's protector. Appearances had to be maintained. The sojourn at the Wartburg was for Luther naturally a period of quiet and composure. He was in need of both. Considering Luther's temperament, it is not in the least surprising that he made fruitful use of the time.

As everyone knows, the chief fruit of the Wartburg period, which lasted from April, 1521, to March, 1522, was

the translation of the New Testament into German. The New Testament came out in September, 1522, on account of which the first edition has been called the September Testament, or even the September Bible. Further editions, somewhat revised again and again, followed.

The New Testament translation was subsequently expanded into a translation of the whole Bible. It took until 1534 to translate the Old Testament. This work was done in Wittenberg, and in contrast to the translating activity accomplished at the Wartburg was virtually the work of a committee. Luther drew together all the available experts, especially linguists; to be sure, he kept the reins firmly in his own hands, and he further saw to it that the responsibility for the wording of the final draft did not slip away from him. The Wartburg translation was Luther's own achievement.

It is also well known that Luther's New Testament translation was made from the original language, i.e., the everyday Greek known as Koine. This fact is connected with the influence of humanism upon Luther, which was indicated above (see pages 23 ff.) and which we shall discuss more fully. In recent times many notions have been corrected which, overdrawn and overshooting the mark, had formerly enjoyed acceptance. The form of the Bible used in the Roman Catholic Church and accepted as authoritative, the Vulgate, had no little importance for Luther. The Greek text in the edition of Erasmus, of which Luther had made use already in his preparation of the Romans lectures, obviously lay beside the Vulgate text and was compared with it at every point. But a further factor needs to be noticed also: there were older translations of the Bible already in existence. To read them is not edifying. They cannot stand the remotest compari-

son with Luther's achievement. It is not even probable that Luther particularly consulted them. Something else must be kept clearly in mind, however: there also must have been orally transmitted translations of Biblical passages into German, coming down from the older Bible translations or even from a still earlier time. Naturally, the Lord's Prayer existed in a German form, and would it not be surprising if familiar parables or other Biblical passages had no current German version? Interestingly, even Luther's own contemporaries observed that the widely controversial " by faith alone " already stood in the old German Bible and was obviously a familiar expression. All this is mentioned not for the purpose of belittling Luther's cultural achievement or of depreciating the significance of the fact that Luther made use of the original text. It is only that fantastic and anachronistic views of Luther's originality must be abandoned.

In this context belongs also the necessary observation that the New High German language, of which Luther's Bible is the first great, celebrated example, was by no means devised by Luther. He started from the language of the Saxon chancellery, which in turn is related to the so-called Bohemian chancellery language. Nevertheless, what a matchless linguistic masterpiece did Luther's Bible prove to be! A mere comparison of individual texts with those of the Bible translations before Luther's convinces one strikingly that Luther's Bible was the only truly German Bible of the lot. The influence of the Luther Bible, moreover, is and remains enormous upon the language of the present day, even if one takes a conservative view of the philological significance of Luther's Bible translation.

The German New Testament of Luther is not the only literary fruit of the quiet period at the Wartburg. Luther

regarded still another task as of the highest urgency, namely, to provide model sermons for those preachers who had to and wanted to preach and yet were able to do so only in a very faulty manner. Collections of sermons existed already in the late Middle Ages. The indulgence preachers themselves made use of prepared material, which we today are inclined to regard disparagingly as " canned " literature; widely used was a book, *The Heavenly Mine*, written by one of Luther's Erfurt teachers, Jenser of Paltz. We ought not scoff about the type of help needed by the " simple ministers." It was inevitable and salutary that Luther should come to their aid, urged to the task, incidentally, by Frederick the Wise. The *Church Postil* was not completed at the Wartburg, but Luther worked on it there.

It was the lectures and public sermons that Luther really could not carry on in the Wartburg. A marvelous devotional book, the exposition of the " Magnificat," Mary's song of praise from Luke 1:46-55, even came out during the exciting period before Worms. Luther had not lost his appetite at the Wartburg for polemical writing. An extremely sharp attack against Archbishop Albert, with a threat against new displaying of relics and dispensing of indulgences, was not published but did make an impression upon Albert. One of the basic controversial treatises, Luther's decisive attack on the whole monastic system and the double ethic of Catholicism, *On Monastic Vows*, was written at the Wartburg, but came off the press later.

The chief significance of the Wartburg period, however, lies at a quite different point, and this at all events dare not be overlooked. While Luther sat in the Wartburg, immobilized, out of action, done for, the German Reformation broke into the open. Let this assertion not be mis-

understood. It is not altogether incorrect, of course, to date the beginning of the German Reformation with 1517. That Luther's Ninety-five Theses introduced a storm in Germany, a general attack upon the traditional church system, has been made clear above. That the name of Luther had a fascination for the masses is characteristic of precisely the years 1517–1521. And already in the period before Luther's sojourn in the Wartburg many men had preached and written in a way different from that used previously. But for the period up to 1521 we cannot speak about a reformation of the church, a change in public worship, an overthrow of church ordinances. Luther had abolished no Mass and issued no battle cry that the cup must be given to the laity, etc. All this took place while Luther was absent, when he was " dead." In important places it assumed violent forms.

Zwickau and Wittenberg, both in Electoral Saxony, were particularly dangerous places. In Wittenberg the " reformers " were Luther's colleague Andrew Bodenstein of Karlstadt, usually named by his place of origin, and Luther's monastic brother Gabriel Zwilling. In Zwickau it was a student of Luther's, recommended by him to Zwickau, Thomas Müntzer, of Stolberg in the Harz region. All who engaged in reforming activity during Luther's stay at the Wartburg wished to demolish everything. In Wittenberg there ensued an actual smashing of images and dreadful excesses in the churches. In Zwickau bitter fights took place with the Franciscans. In questions of faith the leading figures among the " reformers," Karlstadt and Müntzer, later pursued altogether different courses from Luther's, and already in the Wartburg period they took a position basically different from his.

For the handling of the whole Luther case the fact that

this reformation had broken loose without Luther, as has been said, when he was " dead," took on an importance which it is altogether impossible to overestimate. During the ten months of Luther's disappearance it became as clear as day that an execution of the Worms Edict that would mean doing away with Luther, or pressing Frederick the Wise to extradite him, no longer could make much sense. The forces were released precisely by the disappearance of Luther. Everywhere the so-called preachers were preaching passionately, precisely because Luther was no longer present. Scarcely anything more was to be feared by an eventual return of Luther; at most something more could be hoped for. That Frederick the Wise allowed Luther to return, although under a whole host of precautionary measures and in such a way as to establish strictly that the initiative came from Luther, was rather good political thinking or at least rather politically opportune. That Luther " was alive " was clear after the reverberations of his writings throughout the world after 1520 and after the Wartburg period. An actual execution of the death sentence that had been decreed upon him in Worms no longer could be undertaken at all. Even if someone had been able to kill Luther, it would not have been possible to destroy him. Princely wisdom could simply pursue the goal of leaving it up to Luther to guide aright the forces released in his absence and to lead the turbulent movement to a genuine reformation.

IV

Luther's Reformation

14. The New Form of Worship

We should accustom ourselves to designate the years now following, 1522–1525, as those of the " wild growth " of the Reformation. Reform actually took place everywhere, primarily in the towns. In very large measure the reformers were so-called preachers (*Prädikanten*). These were not parish priests (*Pfarrer*) who had their benefices and administered them, and if they resided in them at all, read their Masses and perhaps even heard confession, but had scarcely ever mounted the stairs of a pulpit; nor, again, the so-called Mass priests (*Messpfaffen*) or " priests in a corner " (*Winkelpfaffen*) whose only task was to read endowed Masses at innumerable altars. They were clerics who were appointed, mostly by the town councils, expressly to preach to the people. Many of the preachers were students of Luther or men who by some circumstance or other had become friends and adherents of Luther, such as Martin Bucer or Erhard Schnepf or John Brentz or Theobald Billican at the Heidelberg Disputation. We scarcely know how it was that many preachers came to appropriate Luther's ideas and proclaim his evangelical gospel. Whether these men simply preached a Lutheran message or whether they already administered the Lord's

Supper in both kinds depended on the circumstances or became a question of time. If the preachers succeeded in remaining at their posts, the drastic reform of the ordinances of worship generally followed after one or two years, in the form of the administration of the cup.

The preaching of the new " Lutheran " preachers, meanwhile, was by no means standardized. No one could guarantee that they actually preached exactly as Luther did. Above all, it must be taken into account that not a few of them turned their attention to social questions in a way altogether different from that of Luther. A certain preacher, for example, Jacob Strauss in Eisenach, went his own way but then came back to Luther. Others we find emphatically aloof from Luther, as followers of Karlstadt or especially of Thomas Müntzer. This is precisely the " wild growth " of the Reformation. The Spirit was driving all to proclaim the gospel according to Holy Scriptures, and many appealed no longer to the Scriptures at all, or not to them alone, but to the Spirit.

A picture similar to the sermons of the preachers is presented by the pamphlet literature of the same period. What one reads in it is Luther, or it is very reminiscent of Luther, or sometimes it sounds a little different from Luther. Zwingli in Zurich, for example, was one such new preacher and author, who was captivated by Luther, but appealed also to his own discoveries and actually was influenced very strongly by Erasmus. Indeed, he maintained his distance from Luther in an altogether remarkable way. Whether he was wholly correct in emphasizing his independence from Luther is not so certain. In any case his reformation in Zurich coincides with the time the reformation was unleashed in Germany. And for the so-called fanatics (*Schwärmer*), of whom we have yet to speak, the

same thing is true. Luther had given all the people courage and impetus and had cleared the way for them.

Inherent in the entire reforming movement, which was Lutheran and yet had got under way precisely without Luther, was an impulse to institute an altogether new kind of worship, to base the entire liturgical practice upon the Word and to make it understandable, in other words, to fashion a German liturgy. In this field it was not Luther but others who took the first steps, though Luther surely had it in mind. We know of German liturgies, a German Mass or German office from Nördlingen (Kantz), Wertheim, Wendelstein near Schwabach, Reutlingen, Reval, Zwickau, etc., and from Allstedt in Thuringia. At the latter place Thomas Müntzer, the former Zwickau preacher, who meanwhile had taken an adventurous excursion to Prague, composed and introduced a German office, a noteworthy achievement, with German psalms. At the time when these German liturgical orders were coming into existence, Luther still had little intention of instituting a German liturgy.

For to Luther, upon his return from the Wartburg to Wittenberg, fell the strange task of checking the impetuous trend toward a completely new system of worship and of restoring almost everything to the old situation. It is well known that Luther, having returned from the Wartburg, appeared in the Wittenberg town pulpit freshly shaved and newly tonsured and in his monk's cowl, delivered his famous *Invocavit* Sermons, and entered a protest against establishing a new law and against doing so in such a riotous way, without the orderly support of the government. This meant, however, that the innovations were set aside and the old liturgical order was restored.

Not completely, to be sure! A kind of new law had been

instituted to this extent, that against the elector's will German celebrations of the Lord's Supper had been held, with the distribution of bread and wine. This had taken place, indeed, not only for small circles of men who knew what was involved, but as public congregational celebrations of the Supper, in such a way that no possibility might remain any longer of receiving the Supper in the old way. Against this stark overthrow of the existing orders without consideration or forbearance, and above all without regard for the fact that church orders are an educative force and that their relentless destruction can have chaos as its result, Luther took an energetic stand. Nevertheless, the so-called private or secret Masses continued to be suppressed. These were Masses which a priest was obligated to celebrate every day of the week, in which no congregation took part; they were essentially prescribed as votive Masses for the dead. Here was clearly asserted what had been completely forgotten, that the Supper of the Lord is a table fellowship in which one receives a divine gift, and that out of the meal had been made a sacrifice offered by men with the intention of achieving something before God. So clear was this that Luther would have had to repudiate the central point of his message if he had agreed to reestablish the "private Masses." Even the prayers in the Mass preparatory to the "sacrifice," the so-called canon of the Mass, were left out. Above all it was made clear that conservatism now should not become a kind of basic principle. The new must come, but it must grow, and the new order must stand under the rule of Christian liberty.

In this state of affairs, however, it was to be expected that Luther would soon set forth new ordinances by regular means. He made his beginning with the German order

of Baptism. Here a number of ceremonies that had nothing whatever to do with baptism had to be removed: rubbing the infant with salt and spittle, etc. Luther retained the exorcism, i.e., the casting out of devils, and the renunciation of the devil, made by the person being baptized, or by the sponsors in the case of a child. Above all, baptism needed to be performed in the German language, because only so could it be celebrated at all as baptism in Luther's sense: Baptism is Word, word of forgiveness, by Christ's ordinance connected with a sign, and the Word demands and creates faith. How can a word be heard and awaken faith if those who in due time are to repeat and explain it to the baptized child do not even understand it?

A German marriage booklet was added in 1529 to the baptism booklet of 1523 (new version, 1526). For the Sunday liturgy of the congregation, Luther for the time being issued a Latin order, the *Formula missae et communionis* (*Form of Mass and Communion*), 1523. Not until 1526 did Luther's German Mass come into existence and use. These liturgical creations of Luther have taken on the greatest importance for Luther's whole church, indeed, down to our own days. It is noteworthy, in the first place, that Luther by no means issued his ordinances as a kind of order for the "Lutheran church." He never expected that everywhere around Wittenberg the practice would be exactly like that in Wittenberg, and for Wittenberg itself Luther's German Mass did not immediately become the official order. If Luther had wished to create a uniform liturgy, he would have had to do it much earlier. But this was by no means his desire. Outward things should remain free, and the truth that the unity of the church consists in the one faith in the one gospel, not in the uniformity of outward forms in worship, should not be obscured.

To be sure, a certain type of Lutheran liturgy did come into existence, which long held sway in central and northern Germany, then fell victim to (Pietism and) the Enlightenment, and then in the nineteenth century, with many concessions to the spirit and taste of the times, was taken up again and is defended today with special tenacity. It has been virtually claimed that the distinctively Lutheran liturgy has appeared in clear form and must remain normative for worship in the Lutheran Church for all time to come. Against this opinion, however, stands the fact that large and important parts of the church in Germany which became Lutheran — Württemberg, the Upper German cities, and in particular Strassburg — introduced a completely different type of liturgy. Here the Sunday worship was not at all based upon the Mass, but upon a special late-medieval liturgical form, the preaching service, consisting only of a sermon in a simple framework of prayers and hymns; meanwhile, the Lord's Supper was connected with still another model entirely different from the Roman Mass: an independent late-medieval Communion service. Differences between Luther and the aforementioned churches never arose from the fact that the congregational worship on Sundays was conducted in Württemberg or Strassburg in a completely different form from that used in Wittenberg. It is very dubious, therefore, to speak of "the Lutheran liturgy" in a fixed and normative sense.

With the reference to the Upper German Lutheran liturgical type we have touched still another question. Luther's German Mass is a service with two high points, the sermon and the Lord's Supper. Every Sunday the sacramental service, for which the sermon was an integrating constituent, was held, and it became a fixed practice

always to preach on the Gospel for the day. Today many people regard it as certain that the sacramental service, possibly even with the limitation to the Gospel lections of the ancient church as the sermon text, is the only proper Lutheran service. Even on historical grounds this is not correct. The worship life as it took shape under Luther's influence was very rich. Every Sunday several worship services took place, and in the cities also on several weekdays. These were preaching services! From Luther himself we have not only sermons on the Gospels from the sacramental service, but series of sermons on books of the Bible, and many others as well. Preaching was devoted to the catechism and to entire books of the Old and New Testaments. That the services under the influence of Luther and Wittenberg were in a majority of instances sacramental services is a historical fable and nothing more. The liturgical springtime of the German Reformation was a period of vigor and flourishing for the Word of God. This is not to deny that Luther was aware God has bound up his Word with signs and commanded the preaching of the message along with the sign in Baptism and Lord's Supper. What in any case alone has basic importance is the fact that Luther understood worship as a proclamation of the Word of God and viewed the command to baptize and to celebrate the Lord's Supper as unconditionally binding. From the beginning, the form of worship as Luther designed it had nothing final about it, but was to remain subject to change, and this holds true even of the coupling of sermon and celebration of the Lord's Supper. To what degree Luther regarded the formal side of his liturgy as a relative thing becomes clear from remarks that he made in one of his liturgical writings, the German Mass of 1526, indicating that mature Christians could

practice an entirely different kind of worship. Luther never went beyond mere reflection regarding this entirely different worship. He only shaped the public liturgy, which he understood in a strongly pedagogical sense as an incitement and inducement to faith, and in which he clung to the traditional out of regard and concern for the congregation.

It remains only to say a word about the " evangelical chorale " that Luther introduced into the service. In any case he did so in the sense that through his impulse there developed a powerful movement of congregational singing in evangelical Germany. Luther at first tried to induce others to compose German hymns that could take the place of Latin singing. When his appeal did not find the response he had desired, he composed such hymns himself. The history of the beginnings of the evangelical hymn materializes at first in very small and then in somewhat more comprehensive collections of hymns, for which the designation " hymnbook " soon was adopted: the *Book of Eight Hymns* of 1524, the *Erfurt Manual* of 1524, John Walther's *Choral Hymnbook* of 1524, later the Leipzig Hymnbook, the Strassburg Hymnbook, etc.

The hymns of Luther and his colleagues, however, were not songs to be sung from a book. They impressed themselves swiftly upon the memory of the people and became in this unequivocal sense a living possession of the congregation. The most important hymns of Luther are found even today in every evangelical hymnal. That we cannot say precisely when and under what circumstances the so-called " Luther hymn," " A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," was written is an oddity about which there is virtually nothing we can do. It first appeared certainly in 1528 in the Wittenberg Hymnbook of Weiss. The suggestion has

been made to regard it as having been called forth by a wretched military intrigue known as the Pack affair. It would be a pity if that were correct, for the Pack affair is a truly dark spot in the history of the young evangelical movement. As we have said, however, the situation will perhaps never be fully clarified. Luther did not write poetry because he considered himself a poet. That he was in fact a creative artist with words, however, is discernible even from his hymns. He was much less a musician, though he loved to make music, and yet he evidently composed the melody of " A Mighty Fortress."

15. The Controversy with Humanism

When we described the world of thought into which Luther entered and within which he developed and accomplished his mission, it was inevitable to speak at first and in general about the Renaissance or humanism. The late fifteenth and the early sixteenth century is the period of humanism in Germany. It powerfully reshaped all cultural life and all education there. In the portrayal of Luther's inner development, which led to the great evangelical discovery of the gospel of the glory and grace of God, humanism played no role whatever. The torturing questions with which the monk Luther had to grapple were set for him by the Catholic past, by monasticism, and by his Scholastic theological training. The answer he then found is unmedieval and unscholastic, but neither is it humanistic. We saw that Luther did not absolutely bypass humanism. But that the great intellectual movement of the times contributed nothing essential toward making a reformer of Luther remains unmistakable.

Gradually, however, Luther came into closer touch with

humanism. Of unique and decisive importance for this development was the calling to Wittenberg of a great humanist scholar who became as famous as Luther — *Philip Schwarzert,* known as Melanchthon. Melanchthon, it is well known, was the grandnephew of John Reuchlin, the king of the German humanist scholars. He was only twenty-one years old when he became professor of Greek at Wittenberg in 1518, thus almost a decade and a half younger than Luther. Already from this fact it is understandable — though naturally not only from this fact — that strong influences went out from Luther to Melanchthon. Under Luther's influence Melanchthon became an evangelical Christian in Luther's sense and by 1521 was already the dogmatician of the Reformation. Melanchthon's brilliant youthful achievement — the *Loci communes theologici* [*Theological Commonplaces*] — later frequently revised, became *the* dogmatics of the Reformation, which Luther himself was unwilling or perhaps even unable to write. In addition to this influence of Luther on Melanchthon, that of Melanchthon on Luther must not be forgotten. Luther already knew and used the Greek New Testament when he lectured on the epistle to the Romans before Melanchthon had come to Wittenberg. Melanchthon, however, caused him to familiarize himself with Greek in a much deeper way. Luther had already learned Hebrew too, during his student days in Erfurt. It is known that he procured a Hebrew dictionary there, undoubtedly that of Reuchlin. In his further zeal for Hebrew studies Melanchthon likewise had a share. Luther's enthusiasm for languages is a fruit of his friendship with Melanchthon and of the humanism that through the younger colleague influenced Luther.

Still other influences besides that of Melanchthon con-

tributed to Luther's ever-growing affinity with the humanist movement. A whole series of humanists joined Luther. Crotus Rubeanus, Eoban of Hesse, and Ulrich von Hutten have already been mentioned. Such a man as the Nuremberg patrician Willibald Pirckheimer was in intimate contact with Luther for a time. Again, other humanists are so well known as Luther's colleagues that we hardly recognize them as outspoken humanists who were in personal touch with Erasmus: George Spalatin, the mediator between Luther and Frederick the Wise, or Justus Jonas. Through a profusion of personal contacts Luther inevitably entered into the world of humanism and inevitably this world became to a certain extent his own.

The connection appears most clearly in the fact that Luther introduced the "languages" — the study of ancient languages — into the evangelical movement. This penetrates more deeply into Luther's thinking than might at first appear. Luther's principle, *sola scriptura* — "Scripture alone," or "by Scripture alone" — is intimately related to the humanistic *ad fontes!* ("Back to the sources!"). Repudiation of tradition as the second source of the faith is not the necessary consequence of humanistic thought. Many humanists were students of patristics, and in their dogmatics maintained that the testimonies of the fathers are also, indeed preeminently, the testimonies of the faith, and that the faith of the first centuries is the faith of the church. But where the repudiation of tradition was accomplished, humanism played a role.

Humanism is not only the discoverer of the ancient languages but also of the vernaculars. The Renaissance in Italy had devoted great attention to the common tongue. If Luther observed how the man on the street spoke and what expressions he used, and if Luther exerted himself

to speak in idiomatic German and not a Latin translated into German words, this testifies not only to his innate solidarity with his people but also to the fact that the humanist movement had not passed him by unaffected.

It is a special mark of German humanism that it involved a national pathos. The chivalrous humanist in Germany, for example, fought for German liberty against Roman oppression and extortion. Luther's fight against the Antichrist in Rome is doubtless not the impassioned resistance of the German against a foreign power that had Germany under its sway and wished to keep it so. Luther's battle against the papacy was nourished from altogether different sources; it was the fight for the sovereign rights of Jesus Christ over against men who had usurped them, and therefore the fight for God's rights over against human righteousness. But Luther did not hesitate to insert into his polemics against Rome the tones of mourning over Germany. It is no accident, moreover, that in his address to the nobility Luther candidly supported himself with the "Grievances of the German Nation" (see above, page 21). If along with his vehement critique of German vices Luther so candidly and so proudly identified himself as a German, humanism had a share in his action. In royal freedom the man who in faith and obedience had cast off the monastic vow opened himself to the new world, although the center of his concern was not this new world but once again faith and obedience.

At a very critical moment Luther's receptivity for the world of humanism played a practical role. After the evangelical movement had broken forth, there suddenly set in an exceedingly dangerous cultural decline. As the monasteries waned and their inmates were scattered, so the schools declined. Whether the many higher spiritual

offices for which education was advantageous would survive in the future was already questionable. The existing educational institutions — Latin schools and universities — all at once suffered a shortage of pupils and students. Men such as Karlstadt, moreover, propagated an actually antieducational system of "simplicity in Christ." At that moment Luther set forth a cultural and educational program. The reformation of the universities he turned over to Melanchthon. He himself took charge of secondary education and summoned the German cities to create schools for boys and girls, in order that new generations might be trained for the ministry and also for the learned secular vocations. The treatise *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,* 1524, is full of humanism, manifests a comprehension of history and its detail that is humanistic, and converts the whole humanistic cultural ideal of the time into reality. On the strength of Luther's personal impetus an excellent evangelical school system began to flourish.

And yet at almost the same time Luther broke with humanism. He issued to the humanistic cultural movement no petty and narrow-minded repudiation, but opened himself to it with all the breadth of a great heart and rich spirit, and did not conceal his interest. In a historic controversy, however, he separated himself from the spirit and faith of humanism and made it clear that evangelical faith was something different from humanistic piety. The two men whose names at that time were held in highest esteem were the monk Luther and the international emperor of the cultural world, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. These two suddenly rose up against each other and crossed swords. They disputed over a basic problem of theology — the free will; it was actually through Luther that this problem had acquired such central importance. Already in his writings at the time of the indulgence controversy Luther had flatly denied the existence of a free will in man on his way to salvation. The human will is an instrument either of the grace of God or of the power of evil. God alone has a free will. The renewal of the will to genuine righteousness and holiness is always a matter of grace. Erasmus accommodated himself to Luther as much as he could in the writing with which he started the controversy, his *Diatribe on Free Will,* which appeared in 1524, a year before Luther's *Bondage of the Will.* It was a part of his tactics that he never once discussed with Luther the question of the ecclesiastical upheaval, for which the whole world regarded him as sharing the responsibility — that he who in the minds of many bore the blame of being the spiritual father of Luther sought to approach Luther theologically as near as possible, in order then to be able to say triumphantly: As much as I exert myself to understand him, I cannot accept his impossible, extreme conclusions; Luther and I stand worlds apart! Erasmus asserted and tried to prove nothing else than that salvation is effected almost entirely by grace, but that a cooperation by man must be acknowledged, at least in the sense that a man freely allows or does not allow the work of grace to take place in him.

Luther and Erasmus did not come to an agreement. Erasmus did not understand that Luther's point of departure was always the creative will of God, and that Luther simply could not ascribe to man this predicate, which was proper to the Creator alone. To this day the fight between Luther and Erasmus has not been settled. The Lutheran Church has not officially appropriated

Luther's doctrine of predestination — that salvation is purely and completely the work and decision of God — and still less the intimations of philosophical determinism that are present in Luther. In the last analysis, however, the problem between Erasmus and Luther was by no means only the special theological problem, whether the human will is entirely an instrument of grace or whether it stands in a reciprocal relation to grace. Luther attacked Erasmus with vehemence because the latter regarded religion as something human, as a human striving, a human obedience, a fulfillment of the love commandment, however it may be expressed; Luther, on the contrary, wished to proclaim not a religion of which Christianity is only a special form, but God's work in man. Whether religion is to be seen as the highest and purest form of human existence or whether its central concern is with the grace that is God's saving work in man — a work that I can only allow to be completed in me and which I must accept in faith with humble thankfulness — this was the basic antithesis. In other words, this struggle also centered upon the theme of the righteousness of men and the righteousness of God. The Luther who could show himself so perfectly open to everything great and important that humanism had produced shut himself off from the humanist world at the point where he saw the gospel of the glory and grace of God impugned by it. At the crucial point neither a capitulation to humanism nor a compromise with it was possible for him.

16. Repudiation of Revolution

The reformation that people like Karlstadt, Zwilling, and Müntzer had set into operation during Luther's

absence at the Wartburg was a kind of revolution. What had taken place in Wittenberg or Zwickau was a sheer disregard of governmental order. The smashing of altars in the churches, the Communion "in both kinds" that Karlstadt held on Christmas because the elector had prohibited the New Year's Day Communion that Karlstadt had planned, were revolutionary acts. The exodus of monks and nuns from the cloisters and the marriages of these "religious" and of priests likewise were offenses of the gravest seriousness against imperial law. The breaking of images and such things had taken place contrary to Luther's will, and Luther had dissociated himself from such actions. With his moderation and steadying influence and the restoration of the old order that he undertook upon his return from the Wartburg, he assumed the posture of legality. In principle, however, he was unable to dissociate himself from all illegal proceedings. The release of the monks from monastic vows had occupied him already in the Wartburg, and after his return from it he published the famous revolutionary treatise already mentioned, *On Monastic Vows*. That he thereby was breaking the law of the church and of the empire he saw clearly. Nor was Luther meek as a lamb toward all authority and governmental order even at the moment in which he issued the summons to order and discipline and obedience to the state.

To the entirely unambiguous readiness of Luther to disobey even the law of the German Empire, when it was a question of God's Word and clear commandment, such as the monastic vow, must be added another consideration. The conservative tendencies in the Luther of the *Invocavit* Sermons, etc., which to some extent compensate for this revolutionary attitude, relate only to the limited territory

of Electoral Saxony. Rebellion there could only produce endless havoc. God's Word was free. With Frederick's attitude there was nothing to fear for Lutheran preaching in Electoral Saxony. Excessive revolutionary zeal would surely have made it impossible for Frederick the Wise to protect Luther's cause any longer in the manner that he had followed in the past. Quite different was the situation in all the other territories of the empire. There too " God's Word " continued to flourish because it possessed a power that made it difficult to hinder and because there were a number of influential officials, even town authorities, who by no means wished to hinder its course, since they themselves were caught up in it.

Nevertheless, in the years 1522 and 1523 we can speak of a freedom of God's Word in no other German territory in the same sense as we find it in Electoral Saxony. In the situation within Electoral Saxony it could appear politically shrewd and expedient to put the movement as much as possible under the protection of legality. For all the rest of Germany this was out of the question. That thoughtful people or even fanatics of the new faith saw no other possibility than to fight for the freedom of God's Word in revolutionary ways is very understandable. The ferocity with which Thomas Müntzer, the man who proclaimed himself the prophet of the revolution, acted is explained by his Taborite eschatology: If the Kingdom of God is near, then all the ungodly must be extirpated and the way must be prepared for the reign of God. Even a very sober consideration could lead to the practical conclusion that one must prepare for resistance to the governmental forces that mobilized to enforce the Edict of Worms. How things would work out, no one could know. Many authorities, even ecclesiastical princes, were reluctant to enforce the

Edict of Worms because they feared revolution; on the other hand, the influence of the new message among the people was great. But was there in principle another possibility than a test of force?

Luther's treatise *On Secular Authority, to What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,* written at the end of 1522, is very difficult to interpret. The historian will have to reach a different conclusion from the man who, from the standpoint of an altogether different situation in the present, wrestles theoretically with Luther's writing which originated in its own special situation. Many critics in our day see in Luther the servant of the princes who rendered obeisance to the territorial powers or even promoted their cause; and they are accustomed to hear this Luther speaking also in the treatise we are considering. Is this historically correct? The treatise consists of two main sections. In the first section Luther demands of the Christian acknowledgment of the government as an ordinance of God. It is a command of God to obey it, even when it acts quite unjustly and when obedience leads to the endurance of injustice. This section is the point of departure for all present-day critics. What Luther exhorts sounds like blind, dull-witted obedience to authority. In the second section Luther demands of the Christian, on the contrary, that he resist the government if it requires disobedience to the Word of God and denial of the gospel. He does not mean thereby to say that one dare deprive the land of its government and cause a bloody rebellion against it. Quite the contrary, it may become necessary for the Christian to leave the land or suffer martyrdom. But to yield and to deny the gospel is forbidden the Christian. Contemporaries such as Duke George of Saxony read Luther's treatise on the basis of its second section and saw in it an

ungodly insurrection of Luther against all secular order. But again, we would do an injustice to Luther to accept this judgment. Rebellion was something Luther did not want under any circumstances. But that he nourished a psychological resistance and summoned men to it is obvious; and apparently Luther's treatise on secular authority exerted a considerable influence in this sense. The gospel and obedience to God's command take priority over every earthly duty of obedience!

Now, if we compare the position of Luther with that of Thomas Müntzer and all those who stood more or less close to him, we are not dealing with a contrast of blind obedience to princes versus revolutionary action against authorities hostile to the gospel. At best this would be plausible if we could believe that Luther had stupidly and narrow-mindedly restricted his attention to Electoral Saxony, where his cause was in some degree safe and where obedience to princes might be useful. But dare one ascribe such narrowness to Luther at a time when the Lutheran gospel had been kindled all over Germany and far beyond the boundaries of Germany, but when virtually all the governmental authorities were still Luther's adversaries? The question between Luther and a man like Müntzer was whether revolution dare be incited in the sense of withholding obedience from governmental authorities because they opposed the gospel or insofar as they did so — assuming recognition of their authority in general. All the viewpoints on the evangelical side moved between these two " extreme " opinions.

To agree with Luther and in principle to maintain secular obedience to the secular authorities was possible only on the basis of a great and strong faith in the power of God's Word which will accomplish its purpose by itself

in spite of all opposing powers. This faith Luther had, and it guided him also when the principle he had laid down in his important little tract of 1522 had to be put to a practical test, and that was in the Peasants' War. In the Peasants' War the same Luther who paid heed to no imperial law, nor any other law if conscience commanded disobedience, drew the practical consequences of his conviction that the evangelical Christian has no right to " rebel " against a Roman Catholic government simply because it suppresses the gospel or otherwise oppresses its subjects, or whatever the reason, but that the Christian is only commanded to resist it with the gospel, that is, with the Word. Indeed, if Luther's hotly debated attitude in the Peasants' War is to become understandable, another set of relations must be considered. Luther did not regard the Peasants' War simply as a problem of obedience to authority.

17. Repudiation of the Fanatics and the Peasants

When the historian of our day studies the famous German Peasants' War of 1524–1525, he regards it not in isolation but in the context of the whole German peasant movement that had already been in process for nearly a hundred years. The rebellion of Hans Böhm, called the piper of Niklashausen, 1477, the Bundschuh movement (the lowly " tied shoe " was a peasants' symbol), and the " Poor Conrad " movement are its best-known episodes. The German peasant movement in turn stands within the context of an all-European peasant movement. From the Netherlands, from England, and from France we know of peasant uprisings at a much earlier period: in Bruges, 1323, the so-called *Jacquerie* in France, 1356, and the

English peasants' uprising of 1381 under Wat Tyler. The peasant movement did not come to an end even with the Peasants' War of 1525, but continues down to the most recent times. Depending on the historian's special interest, he either concentrates upon the history of the German social classes, of which the peasant movement naturally forms only one side, or he fastens upon the " ideological " side of the peasant movement, which to a considerable degree is a theological matter. In part, the peasant movement and the Peasants' War involved simply the longing for the restoration of ancient rights. In the second place, actual plans for an imperial reform were drawn up, but to put them into operation of course was a serious problem. The proposals could be very sober; influential in shaping them, however, were also ideals that spring from the recesses of man's inmost convictions and principles of faith, the ideal of divine justice or that of Christian freedom, the realization of which was demanded and sought in the order of society. With these ideals we come upon certain cultural and religious currents, certainly in particular the movement of Wycliffe, and of Hussitism, which is closely related to it. The knowledge of these connections is important for understanding Luther's attitude toward the peasants' revolution, and accordingly for the collision that took place between Luther and the peasants. The struggle between Luther and the peasants was a battle between two kinds of gospel.

That the modern historian views the Peasants' War in this briefly sketched context is far from meaning that Luther actually analyzed it in exactly the same terms and that his perspective coincided with that of the historian of today. Luther placed the " rebellion " of the peasants into the context of fanaticism. Whether he did so justly or unjustly is of course a very important, but also a rather difficult, question. To put it frankly, for Luther the peasants' uprising was a work of the " murdering prophets," and by this expression he meant principally Thomas Müntzer of Allstedt and then of Mühlhausen, and his followers. A very influential viewpoint today [that of Marxism], according to which Luther is regarded altogether negatively as the enemy of the peasants and of all the oppressed, in a curiously uncritical fashion takes Luther's side in judging the situation. That the Peasants' War was the work of Thomas Müntzer is either regarded as self-evident or proved with a great flourish, and it seems, also convincingly. Actually there is little evidence to prove that Müntzer exerted an influence worthy of mention upon the peasants. But that Luther viewed and judged the situation so is surely incontestable, and his fight against the peasants was at the same time a fight against the " murdering prophets " who had turned the peasants — according to Luther's opinion — into a robbing and murdering horde.

What was the point of this whole movement called " the fanatics " or " fanatical spirits "? It has been said already that Luther's assault against the Roman Church and thereby against the whole prevailing order of things summoned into action all the spirits who were dissatisfied with Rome and the inherited order. The preaching of those who had set themselves to work while Luther sat in the Wartburg or even earlier was submitted to no fixed standards, and quite generally passed for Lutheran. Among those who came into action were some who manifestly had altogether different intentions from Luther's. Through connections that bound Thomas Müntzer, then preacher and minister in Zwickau, with the so-called

journeymen weavers, textile workers whose ideas were Hussite-Taborite, there developed a peculiar reforming version of Christianity that aimed at a new apostolic church, whether indeed an earthly thing at all or already the beginning of heavenly glory, it is difficult to say. Everything that the men around Müntzer had to say about the new apostolic church they had learned through inner illuminations, they had received from the Spirit. They appealed to dreams and visions. Through Müntzer's writing and in the development of the personal relationship between Müntzer and Luther emerged a sharp antithesis: You, Luther, stand upon the dead letter, and we stand upon the living Spirit; your gospel is the law of the letter, ours is the new, free gospel of the Spirit. Everything merely written and externally ordered was repulsive to Müntzer and his people; they even rejected the sacraments of the church. Child baptism was sheer nonsense, like the transubstantiation in the Mass. Müntzer's ideal was hardly late baptism — hence in certain circumstances rebaptism — and a simple celebration of the Mass; he was obviously a despiser of sacraments as a matter of principle.

The situation was quite different among the groups which appeared in Switzerland and in southwestern Germany near the Swiss border. Their thought was similar to that of the Zwickau prophets, and apparently arose out of the same presuppositions, viz., medieval sectarianism, but they made "believer's baptism" their watchword and observed the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in a very unsacramental sense. These authentic Anabaptists entered Luther's field of vision rather late, although they are perhaps more important for Reformation history as a whole than the central German radicals. Luther had to deal first with the fanatics of his own territory, who even while he sat at the Wartburg sent messengers to Wittenberg and tried to promote their viewpoint there. They went around, as Luther says, crying: "Spirit! Spirit! Spirit!" and Müntzer then wrote against "the sensual and soft-living hulk in Wittenberg" and "Brother Fatted Pig," meaning Luther.

In an interesting contrast to the fanatics' principles of Spirit and inwardness stands their strong tie to the Bible, primarily to the Old Testament, in moral questions. The social program of the fanatical movement is rooted in the Old Testament. Above all, the Old Testament was pressed into service to justify the bellicose spirit of Müntzer and his sedition. Müntzer renewed the wars of Yahweh and his people against the heathen; he finally came to sign himself "Thomas Müntzer with the sword of Gideon." The people of God are the believers in the sense of the Zwickau prophets. All others are unbelievers and enemies of God, and they and most particularly their leaders, namely, the secular princes, must be slain like dogs. Thus Müntzer's war sermon has an astonishingly rich Old Testament coloration, and this program of Müntzer might even be regarded as Biblical if it is viewed in its real intention. In reality, however, it is again the Spirit who drives Christians to fight against the godless and to cut down everything that opposes the approaching Kingdom of God. Müntzer's revolutionary program is a prophetic program. When Luther fought Müntzer he was contending against Müntzer the false prophet, and false prophets are always most dangerous when they incite to sedition and destruction. Then the evil spirit who speaks out of them calls together all the spirits of the lower world.

Only so can we understand Luther's "No," which he uncompromisingly hurled at the peasant movement of the

years 1524 and 1525. Of course, it may be said that Luther had a conservative mind, and perhaps a professor at an electoral university had to have a conservative mind at that time. But that explanation would be too cheap. Certain it is that when Luther felt himself bound in conscience and forced to a certain action, he disregarded all bonds except those of the conscience, and heedless of consequences translated command into act. If Luther could have regarded Müntzer as a true prophet, everything would have been different for him. As it was, with his deep emotion, which was seldom so unbridled as in the controversy with the peasants, Luther went far beyond the currently prevailing rule among pious, civilly dutiful Christians. Friends of Luther were shocked at his harshness and pitilessness.

Luther spoke out three times against the peasants. He did so first when the very moderate *Twelve Articles of the Peasantry in Swabia* came to his attention about the middle of April, 1525. In his tract *Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia,* he appealed to the conscience of the princes and lords and earnestly begged them to respond to the judgment of God — for this is what they would have to regard a peasant uprising in any case — with humility, penitence, and accommodation toward the peasants. To the peasants he declared that sedition was in all cases unjust and contrary to God's commandment. This principle Luther always maintained; he left it directly in suspension, however, in the circumstance that a true prophet or special charismatic agent (*Wundermann*) of God overturned the usual order in the plenary power of God. Luther then passionately resisted the peasants' attempt to base their demands upon the gospel. It now came to light that the peasants'

gospel had to do with a Christian love and Christian freedom whose goal was the abolition of serfdom, burdens on the land, the tithe in its current form, and many such things. This kind of Christian justice and Christian freedom they had not learned from Luther. It cannot be summarily denied that here or there, and even widely, "Lutheran" preachers had so proclaimed the new gospel. In this way, but only in this way, can it be explained that the peasants again and again appealed to Luther, and that Luther's adversaries declared him responsible for the peasants' rebellion. Luther asserted that his gospel, that *the* gospel, was quite another thing: it teaches men to be devout and God-fearing, to accept misery from God's hand, to suffer injustice, and to trust in the grace of God in all distress and need. The justice or righteousness of God proclaimed in the gospel is the forgiveness of sins (see above, page 66), and hence is something altogether different from the "divine justice" found again and again on the lips of the peasants.

One can say that from a political point of view, Luther's decision not to ally himself with the peasants was a stroke of genius. To a superficial glance the popular peasant movement offered Luther a great opportunity to win Germany for his cause, but much more obvious to a more penetrating observer, in view of the peasants' instability, was the certainty that if he joined the peasants, he would be hitching his cause to a wagon that was hurtling into the abyss and would then irresistibly drag his cause along with it. Luther at most sensed these connections, by no means reasoned them out. His concern was only to remain true to the gospel, which needed to be proclaimed, but not put into effect by blood and sword.

It should not be denied that in his second peasant

tract, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants,* which he wrote as an appendix to a new edition of his first tract, Luther issued a summons to strike back, in tones that testify of fearful human passion and an absence of pastoral kindness. One misses the pastoral note most painfully in the last tract, the *Open Letter Concerning the Hard Book Against the Peasants.* But it cannot be disproved that if Luther had allied himself with the peasants, he would have betrayed his gospel of the glory and grace of God whose desire is to make man righteous in His presence and make him a new creature. The demand that Luther should have gone along with the peasants for the sake of the German people or out of sympathy with the oppressed amounts to an expectation that Luther would abandon his reformation. It is not customary for the historian so to write history as to lay down such unreasonable demands. Anyone for whom the gospel had become truth through Luther's teaching would inevitably have to regard Luther as a traitor if he had gone over to the peasants. In regard to the pastoral heart and the proper word, however, we must certainly ask questions of Luther.

Naturally the Peasants' War signified a crisis for Luther's reputation. He was severely reproached that during the very time of the Peasants' War he married, and then became the father of a family: who could do such a thing when the devils were loose and events were taking place that could deeply endanger the great cause? It was just by his marriage with Katherine von Bora, a descendant from the Saxon provincial nobility, that Luther "spited all devils." With this marriage he also manifested his complete assurance, not in the sense that he was altogether sure of a "happy" issue of all these events — his

thoughts were far too much directed toward the Last Day — but in the other sense, that he knew assuredly that he was on the right path. Luther's cause did not suffer serious damage through the Peasants' War. His reformation continued, and indeed not, as is often asserted, as an enterprise of the princes, a reformation produced and regulated by the government, but as a spontaneous movement. After the Peasants' War the Reformation was introduced and carried through in many north German cities, indeed as a spontaneous popular movement from below — clear proof against a historic legend that has not become true just because it has eaten its way firmly into people's minds.

It may be remarked parenthetically that in another situation Luther had already renounced the claim to human, political forces for his cause. Against the imperial knights who revolted in 1522 (the Sickingen War), who wished to use Luther, but whom he in turn would also have been able to use, he was just as distrustful as against the peasants.

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of Luther's position regarding the problem of a war against the Turk. Luther wrote on the subject several times. He infused courage in the rulers to mobilize all possible military power against the enemy. Against a crusade in the name of the gospel, however, he warned urgently. And exactly as in the case of the seditious peasants, he necessarily saw in the Turk a chastening rod of God, which can be wrested from God's hand only with faith and prayer, penitence and humility.

18. Separation from the Swiss Reformation

According to Luther's view of things we are dealing here with no new theme; the separation from the Swiss belongs rather to the theme of Luther's separation from fanaticism. Luther regarded Zwingli and all his followers, including such a man as Oecolampadius, who indeed had for a long time stood very close to Melanchthon, as fanatical spirits, or at best as a special variety of them. From this viewpoint are to be understood all the unjust judgments that Luther profusely leveled at Zwingli. From it is fully clarified why Luther never reached an understanding with the Swiss, although with the upper German cities, whose convictions were very closely related to those of the Zwinglians, he came to an understanding after the catastrophe of the Swiss in the battle of Kappel in 1531, even though the settlement took over five years to achieve. The conversation between Luther and the Swiss was not ended even by the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, through which Luther had united with the upper Germans. Further negotiations took place, yet reconciliation was not achieved.

We should not be blind to the fact that Luther's whole relation to the Swiss was saddled with a prejudice that at least in essential points rested on erroneous presuppositions. On the other hand, it dare not be overlooked that reasons and motives were not lacking to cause Luther to take this position toward the Swiss. The controversy over the Lord's Supper began as a dispute between Luther and Karlstadt and changed into a dispute between Luther and Zwingli, and Karlstadt belonged in the ranks of fanaticism. To be sure, he had nothing in common with Thomas

Müntzer, especially in respect to the question of the bloody establishment of a new order. Karlstadt did not take up the "sword of Gideon." Therefore, to whatever degree responsibility for the Peasants' War can be assigned at all to men of the Protestant movement, he should be exonerated. Karlstadt, however, developed in the direction of an inward type of Christianity, with a new ascetic stamp and aloofness from political powers. This we find again in the fanatical movement, primarily among upper German Baptists (called Anabaptists by their adversaries), the peaceful Baptists who wished to live as a quiet fellowship of God, separated from the rest of the world, and separated particularly from the territorial church system without, however, rebelling against the political rulers. At the same time that Karlstadt propounded his rather primitive Eucharistic doctrine that "This is my body" refers to Jesus' actual body at the Supper Table, not to the bread of the Supper, a Silesian nobleman named Caspar Schwenckfeld of Ossig, attempted to make plausible to Luther his Eucharistic doctrine, which amounted to a spiritualization of the process. Schwenckfeld is one of the great spiritualists of the Reformation Era. For these men the life of faith was grounded in inwardness, in an inner illumination, without assuming prophetic-apocalyptic forms and without leading to the principle of believer's baptism.

Zwingli's Eucharistic doctrine rests upon that of a Dutchman, Cornelius Hendrix Hoen, and asserts in brief that in the Eucharistic words a figure of speech is used, an *alloeosis*. It may be said, nevertheless, that in the doctrine of the Eucharist, Zwingli was not too far from the fanatics and Baptists: the Supper is a memorial meal by which the church reminds itself that its Lord died for it.

It must be indicated further that Zwingli at the beginning doubted the propriety of child baptism. This doubt later played no role for him, but once one suspects Zwingli of fanaticism, this recollection can return again and again.

Luther's tract of December, 1524, *Letter to the Christians at Strassburg,* and his vehement treatise *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and the Sacrament* at the turn of 1524–1525, were still directed against Karlstadt. In the actual controversy with Zwingli belong *That These Words, "This Is My Body," Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics,* April, 1527, a reply to Zwingli's *Friendly Exposition* of February, 1527, and the so-called "Great" *Confession Concerning the Supper,* March, 1528. Luther does not alter his conception of the Supper, for he retracts nothing of his contention that the Word is bound with a sign in the sacrament and that this Word is directed to faith. But Luther feels himself bound by the word *is* in the Eucharistic words, "This is my body," and he resists substituting a "signifies" (*bedeutet*) for this "is." In the bread and wine Christ's body and blood are present, though not in a carnal, "capernaitic" manner (to use the technical expression; cf. John 6:17, 51 f.). If this is so, however, unbelievers also receive the body of Christ, but naturally to their own condemnation. For this opinion Luther again cites a Bible passage from which he cannot depart, I Cor. 11:29.

The contest was waged as an exegetical controversy. Besides this antithesis on the interpretation of the words of the Supper, however, another factor must be taken into account. The fact that Christ's body in the Lord's Supper is offered simultaneously at many places requires an explanation. Did not the whole Christ ascend to heaven, with spirit and flesh, according to his divine and his human

natures? This was Zwingli's opinion. In Zwingli's circle there soon emerged an inclination to acknowledge a kind of spiritual presence of Christ. Martin Bucer, who with Philip of Hesse was anxious at all costs to effect an alliance between the upper German cities, the Swiss, and the central Germans, did everything he could to produce a compromise formula. This was the purpose of the Marburg Colloquy, which took place October 2–4, 1529. Zwingli was of the opinion that the human nature of Christ is in heaven, and hence inaccessible. Luther interpreted the clause of the creed, that Christ sits on the right hand of God, to mean that God's right hand is everywhere and that Christ is therefore to be found everywhere even according to his humanity. In the Supper he reveals himself to us and becomes savingly present for us. For this "illocal" conception of heaven, with the presence of Christ everywhere, even according to his humanity, the designation "ubiquity" came into use. Zwingli and Oecolampadius and the Swiss in general, later also some Lutherans, rejected the ubiquity concept; Luther and other theologians such as John Brentz of Swäbisch-Hall, did not deviate from it. At Marburg, too, this antithesis could not be settled.

Regarding the Marburg Colloquy it only remains to be said for the present that it had a background of high politics and accordingly was fraught with quite another pattern of problems as well. The emperor was just about to terminate his rivalry with Francis I of France and Pope Clement VII, and then come to Germany to settle the religious question there. This yielded so threatening a prospect that Philip considered it advisable to form an elaborate political alliance. In its way stood the dogmatic antagonism between Luther and the Swiss, into which also

the important upper German cities, primarily Strassburg, had been drawn. There arose at least the appearance that questions of belief might have to be subordinated to "higher" political necessities. This sharply aggravated Luther's suspicions and sensitivities, especially because he was altogether disinclined to make way for the gospel or even merely defend it by means of political force. The idea of a war against the emperor was to him and to his prince not only shocking but something closely resembling the peasants' principles. Luther and Melanchthon traveled to Marburg, as did Zwingli and Oecolampadius, not to mention the other participants in the colloquy. The participants in the proceedings actually agreed on fourteen articles. On the fifteenth, concerning the Lord's Supper, they differed. In other words, Luther separated permanently from the Swiss Reformation. The history of further negotiations contains no flashes of light that permit the supposition that a closer approach to a final settlement has ever been made.

19. Luther's Approval of the Evangelical Territorial Churches

The Peasants' War had the most important consequences for Luther's reform movement. What might have been expected, and what actually was expected by anxious souls like Philip Melanchthon, did not happen, namely, that after the suppression of the peasants the territorial princes who in the majority still supported the old faith would now fall upon the Lutheran movement and enforce the Worms Edict with blind zeal. Not that Luther had earned the thanks of the princes by his peasant treatises! Had that been the case, no doubt more acknowledgments of the new

faith would have been made than actually were forthcoming. One of the youngest but most capable and promising lords, Philip of Hesse, who had cooperated vigorously in suppressing the peasants, openly professed the gospel of the Reformation and adhered to Luther, though he was far from tying himself down one-sidedly to Luther's line against the men of the Swiss Reformation, who already were clearly deviating from it. Important cities turned to the Reformation. At the Diet of Speyer in 1529 fourteen cities joined the protest. Among the evangelical cities, Nuremberg was a complete small territory, so far as domain is concerned. The princes of Ansbach and Kulmbach turned evangelical. So did one of the Ascanian line, Wolfgang of Anhalt, and a Lower Saxon prince, Ernst of Lüneburg. We may mention also a special case, still to be discussed, namely, the transition to the evangelical faith of a larger but very remote province, Prussia. In terms of the whole German Empire, this is not much. Toward the "princes' flunky," Luther, the majority of German princes were still antagonistic. Nevertheless, no attack was launched against Luther after the Peasants' War. It must have been rather obvious that the Lutheran movement was not the same as the peasant movement.

Another factor entered the picture, however. It became fully clear that the "wild growth" of the Reformation, as it had developed in the period between 1521 and 1525, had to be brought to an end. The necessity of breaking with it came to be recognized as unavoidable by all the governments favoring the evangelical faith. The first move to establish an evangelical church system, curiously enough, was made by the Master of the Teutonic Order, a Brandenburger with the same given name, Albert, as that of his relative, the archbishop and cardinal whose in-

dulgence affair had kindled the Reformation. It took place in Prussia, i.e., approximately the same region as the later East Prussia. Luther, with whom he had been in touch, encouraged him to make the move. Prussia (in the ancient, more restricted sense of the name) became the first German evangelical state, Hesse and Electoral Saxony joined the ranks, and everywhere that the gospel penetrated the same path was followed.

The establishment of an evangelical territorial church proceeded in this way: the ruler appointed a visitation commission, fairly equally composed of theologians and jurists, and a visitation or, at appropriate intervals, visitations were conducted. The father of the visitation idea is presumably the Zwickau pastor, Nicolas Hausmann, a friend of Luther's. Others, such as the Eisenach preacher, Jacob Strauss, also had the idea. After all, it was by no means new. Visitation belonged to the duties of the bishops, indeed was their central duty. Some bishops even tried to attack the Lutheran movement by conducting visitations themselves. Electoral Saxony, where John the Steadfast had succeeded his brother Frederick the Wise, actually prohibited the regular bishops of the territory from going into the congregations. The new and essential feature of the evangelical visitations is that they became an affair of the territorial princes, and in this way the whole church system came under the general control of the princes. The old-believing princes would have liked very much to imitate the evangelical princes in this respect, for the trend of the times had long been in the direction of placing ecclesiastical affairs under princely control. One of the greatest proponents of this idea was Luther's great adversary, George, duke of Albertine Saxony.

The procedure of evangelical visitors was to travel to

the chief towns and summon the pastors and leading laymen. The jurists inquired concerning church property, and it was their duty to see to it that these possessions were not estranged, for the nobility had a strong inclination to usurp church property and the town councils simply to confiscate the monastic property left ownerless by the departure of the monks. Care had to be taken, however, to assure incomes for the pastors. The theologians examined the pastors on whether their moral life was orderly, that is, whether they frequented the public houses, had quarrels with their church members, led a dissolute life with questionable women, or whether they lived respectably, treated their housekeepers honorably, reared decently any children they might have, and so forth. The picture that emerged must have been rather dark. Family life in the rectory was fairly common. This hypocrisy was corrected by forcing the pastors to publish the banns with their housekeepers and marry them. When he consecrated an evangelical "bishop" in Merseburg in 1544, Prince George III of Anhalt, Luther did not hesitate to use the opportunity quite personally to announce the marriage banns of the willing dean of the cathedral, and thus to take care that the dean's children might be freed from the taint of illegitimacy in a natural way and not by papal dispensation. Not without interest for social history is the fact that in principle this way was offered even to the higher clergy; it could not be questioned, of course, whether the marriage was "socially proper." A further concern in the visitations was the educational status of the pastor, and finally and foremost of all, his willingness or unwillingness henceforth to preach the gospel.

Naturally, a visitation could be repeated, even frequently, if it was necessary. This became precisely the

rule. But it was impossible to make the visitation commissions a permanent institution. The function of spiritual supervision then was taken over by the pastors of the chief towns as " superattendents " or superintendents. Of course the superintendents are not the successors of the bishops in the canonical sense of episcopal jurisdiction; in the Biblical sense Luther saw in the pastors the true bishops. This is one of the reasons why no evangelical office of bishop developed, even though there were bishops who espoused the gospel, as in Prussia or later in Brandenburg. But in the sense that spiritual supervision was taken up by the superintendents, they became, so to speak, the new bishops in the evangelical church system.

Later, the so-called consistories were established, e.g., in Wittenberg, 1539, the office for ecclesiastical affairs in regard to administration and adjudication; the distinction between these two functions is a development of the nineteenth century. They were set up because there was a legal complex here which the bishops had formerly managed and for which a new form of management was needed, viz., the whole complex of marriage law. It appears as if the old consistories were simply matrimonial courts. However, they became official territorial offices for ecclesiastical affairs. In all this it becomes clear that the influence of Lutheran preaching and theology became decisive for the new church system, but that ultimately the entire ecclesiastical system came under the direction of the territorial princes and of the town governments. Through the patronage system the lower nobles were to a considerable degree interposed between the territorial church administration and the congregations, and their importance for the new evangelical church life dare not be underestimated.

We must not regard the territorial visitation system and

the entire territorial church administration simply as a creation of Luther. Luther helped to shape it insofar as his spirit and his gospel left its impress on the new church life; he took part in the visitations, and he composed the preface to the " Instruction for the Visitors," which Melanchthon had written for the famous church and school visitation of 1526–1530 in Electoral Saxony and which also was used widely outside Saxony. Actually, however, he had not wanted things to proceed in this fashion. He was unable to prevent the territorial princes from taking their churches under their jurisdiction, and he came to terms with the actuality. He could see absolutely no possibility of changing the situation. In this he was correct. He gave the settlement an orderly theological foundation by treating the princes as baptized Christians and as the " leading members of the church," who alone had the power to institute a new ecclesiastical order. It must not be concluded, however, that the territorial princes also regarded what they did as subject to this limitation. In taking over the management of the church they quickly came to see a princely right or a princely duty, and Melanchthon provided them a good conscience in it through his doctrine of the prince's duty to care for both tables of the law (*cura utriusque tabulae*).

It is striking that no self-government of congregations came into existence, especially that no congregational church councils or boards of elders were established for church discipline. At the Synod at Homberg on the Efze in Hesse, October, 1526, something like this was considered under the influence of a French Franciscan, Francis Lambert of Avignon, and an attempt was made to form core congregations of earnest Christians. Luther, who had once entertained such a thought himself (see above,

pp. 100 f.), advised against the plan. Under the influence of Martin Bucer, however, through the *Ziegenhain Order of Church and Discipline,* 1539, the congregations in Hesse were finally granted an activity of their own and rights in the matter of ecclesiastical discipline were assigned to them. Luther considered the congregations still too immature.

A very essential element for an evangelical church system was still lacking. How can the evangelical doctrine be fixed in such a way that a test can easily be made whether a pastor or a community confesses the true gospel? When pastors were dismissed and new ones appointed, as became frequently necessary in the visitations, a norm of evangelical doctrine to which the pastors were bound was needed; Wittenberg had to train pastors for the towns, and in the villages some more or less capable persons had to be accepted, often artisans or former monks. Luther lent assistance during the period of the visitation by composing his two famous catechisms. First the Small Catechism was published in the form of a broadside, then the Large Catechism, which of course was a book, and finally also the Small Catechism in book form. Whether a pastor was able to understand and to teach the catechism could serve as a standard for his examination (though the Small Catechism itself was prescribed for heads of families!).

But the catechisms could not be regarded as sufficient. It became necessary to standardize the doctrine of the young evangelical church in an altogether different, clearer, and more comprehensive manner. It became the rule that a church order, as it might be drawn up, for example, in a visitation, contained primarily doctrinal articles. This we find very frequently at a later time. At first, however, the theological controversies with the

Swiss and the south Germans came to the aid of the evangelical princes and theologians. Whether one should enter political alliances with people with whom one was not united in faith was greatly disputed, quite apart from the fact that an alliance against the emperor on the part of the Saxon Elector, the south Brandenburgers, and the imperial city of Nuremberg — which as an imperial city of course was a city of the emperor and would have been rebelling against its own lord — ran up against most serious scruples. Whether men were one in faith, however, remained to be proved. In the course of the great examination whether unity could be reached with the Swiss, the so-called Schwabach Articles first were produced in the circle of the evangelicals from Electoral Saxony. They were set forth by the Wittenberg theologians in the summer of 1529 for the political negotiations pending with those who earlier in the same year had issued the " Protestation " in Speyer. In the Marburg Articles the point of departure was the Schwabach document. Even if the Schwabach Articles may not be acknowledged, strictly speaking, as Luther's work, Luther's share in them at any rate is very great.

With the failure of Marburg the process of evangelical confessional formation came to a standstill. Through entirely new and dangerous developments, however, it got moving again. The emperor actually came to Germany in 1530 to hold an imperial diet and to dispose of religious errors. The Roman Catholic theologians had prepared themselves brilliantly for the debate with the Protestants or, rather, for their silencing. Luther's adversary Eck had produced (with others) four hundred and four articles on questions of faith. The evangelical side had the Schwabach Articles. Now it remained to be seen who would stand by

them. The Swiss could not be counted on, of course, nor could the upper German cities. Melanchthon had sketched out some articles of faith, the so-called Torgau Articles, which dealt primarily with abuses in the church and not with the actual fundamental questions of the faith. Very late, then, during the diet itself, the Schwabach and Torgau Articles were combined and reworked by Melanchthon, and out of these emerged the Augsburg Confession, which as is well known has become for all times the doctrinal basis of the churches called by Luther's name.

The whole Diet of Augsburg in 1530, with its dramatic struggle between the emperor and the evangelical estates, with the various documents that arose in this context — the Augsburg Confession (*Augustana*), the Roman *Confutation*, the *Apology*, Zwingli's *Reckoning of Faith* (*Fidei ratio*), and the so-called *Tetrapolitana*, the confession of four southwestern German cities — belongs to the history of the German Reformation, not properly to the history of Luther. Even from the purely external standpoint, the Diet of Augsburg cannot be woven into the history of Luther: still an outlaw, Luther could not be taken along to Augsburg, but could participate in the affairs of the diet only from a distance, residing at the Coburg castle. Luther's letters from the Coburg written to Augsburg and to his home stand among the most renowned Luther testimonies of all, e.g., the good-humored letter that displays Luther's great inner strength, written to his table companions at Wittenberg about the diet of crows and jackdaws outside his window, and the second letter in which he writes to the Saxon chancellor Brück of the great vault of heaven that has no pillars and yet does not fall, though so many men may writhe and tremble. The noblest fruit of the period at the Coburg is Luther's

Exposition of the 118th Psalm, the beautiful *Confitemini*.

Meanwhile, Luther was forced to recognize, precisely while he was at the Coburg, that he was a man plagued by many kinds of bodily ills. In view of the serious situation of the evangelicals in Augsburg, however, he remained firm and cheerful and assured in faith. From a human standpoint the position of the evangelical cause seemed virtually hopeless. Charles V had come to terms with the French by the "Ladies' Peace" of Cambrai, 1529, and with the pope by the Peace of Barcelona, 1529. The Protestants, so called since the previous diet held at Speyer in 1529, succeeded in having their confession, the *Augustana*, read aloud. It was only received as information, however, and was regarded as confuted by the Roman Catholic counterconfession, the *Confutation*. The result of the diet was the resolution that the Edict of Worms should now be carried out. The Protestants had until April 15, 1531, to submit voluntarily. Melanchthon's anxious efforts to arrive at a peaceful agreement through the most extreme concessions were humanly understandable but substantially futile. Luther stiffened Melanchthon and placed the issue of the cause entirely in the hands of his Lord Christ.

Apart from this, the Augsburg Diet of 1530 had further importance for Luther. Of course Luther saw that even in the Augsburg Confession Melanchthon's caution and circumspection were expressed. Knotty subjects such as the doctrine of transubstantiation in the Mass and the doctrine of purgatory had not been treated at all in the articles of the *Augustana*, and the question of papal power was not broached. The whole tenor of the *Augustana* was such as to lay all emphasis on proving the agreement of "our churches" with the ancient church, even with the Roman Church in its original form. Certain corruptions

alone had been removed, it was alleged, in order to recover and realize the true image of the church. Luther later sought the opportunity, and found it in the Smalcald Articles (see below, pages 149 f.), to supplement what was lacking in the *Augustana*. He placed himself on the foundation of the Augsburg Confession, however, and thereby expressed his approval of the new evangelical church order. For such an order was now in operation, no matter how emphatically and repeatedly the evangelical side claimed to belong to the ancient church and to comprise no separation. The new churches even united externally in a political defensive organization, the Smalcald League, projected already before Augsburg, founded at the end of December, 1530, officially ratified on February 27, 1531. It was burdened with all sorts of problems. It could never form a kind of empire-wide evangelical church, for who could prevent an estate from becoming evangelical without entering the Smalcald League?

These problems cannot be discussed here. For Luther there was one difficult problem to solve before he could give his approval. He had always previously denied a right of armed resistance against the emperor. If the emperor suppresses the gospel, it is the gospel that must defend itself against him by its inner power; men, even if they are princes, dare not take up weapons in defense of the gospel. Luther ultimately allowed the jurists to convince him that according to the structure of the German Empire the princes are not simply subjects of the emperor, but rulers who share in the government of the empire and in responsibility for the empire. A necessary resistance to the emperor by the princes then would be no rebellion. With this outlook Luther could agree that the league should be established. In reality the Augsburg Recess was made futile by the foundation of the league. The league became so powerful a factor in the German Empire that after its establishment one German territory after the other came over to the new church order and the Reformation entered upon an unprecedented growth. Luther took his place within the new church system that to this day bears his name. In an altogether direct sense it is no longer his work. An authority within the evangelical world Luther remained, however, until the end of his life.