

CHAPTER V

FROM THE INDULGENCE THESES TO THE DISPUTATION AT LEIPSIC (1517-1519)

I. THE CONTROVERSY ON INDULGENCES

In consequence of recent researches on the development of Luther, far less significance is to be attached to the celebrated controversy on indulgences which followed the theses of 1517, than tradition has ascribed to it. The ninety-five theses nailed to the door of the Wittenberg castle-church do not mark the commencement of the Protestant Reformation. As we have heard Luther himself intimate, the *initium evangelii* is to be sought in the new theology of Wittenberg and in the public movement which it created. The controversy concerning indulgences simply caused the movement to assume universal proportions. It placed the monk Luther upon the stage of the world and offered him an opportunity of gradually unveiling his revolutionary doctrine before all his contemporaries.

There was no room for indulgences in a system of grace and justification which attacked the meritoriousness of good works and the value of atonement.

Even before these ideas had fully matured (July 27, 1516), Luther delivered a sermon in which he expressed himself correctly on the Catholic doctrine of indulgences. Succeeding ages could have been benefited by his instructions. He correctly emphasized that an indulgence is not a remission of the guilt of sin, but "a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, which the penitent would have to suffer, be it that it was imposed by the priest, be it that he had to suffer for it in purgatory." "In the gaining of a [plenary] indulgence, therefore," he says in conformity with the belief of the age in which he lived, "one may not then and there feel sure of salvation." "Only those gain a plenary remission of punishment who have become reconciled to God by true contrition and confession." At that time Luther still knew and appreciated the value of indul-

gences for the dead. The application of these, he explains in the same sermon, is made by way of intercession; hence a complete redemption of souls in each instance is not to be assumed. The foundation of indulgences he correctly states in these words: "They are the merits of Christ and His Saints [*i. e.*, they derive their efficacy from this treasury of merits], and we must, therefore, esteem them with all due reverence." Whatever abuses may have crept in, he holds that it is "most useful that indulgences should be offered and gained."¹

The abuses indicated by Luther had reached a certain crisis in his day. Since good works are requisite for the gaining of an indulgence, and since it was customary at that time to require a small donation to be made to some pious or useful purpose, to procure delivery of the briefs of indulgence, indulgences were frequently made the means of collecting money. Exaggerated recommendations and avaricious practices combined to degrade them. The so-called *quaestores*, who wandered about plying this trade, were the chief culprits.² But many ecclesiastical superiors were also guilty of having increased the evil in the temple of the Lord by distributing indulgences with all too temporal trimmings and worldly bustle.

The extent to which even the papal curia went, may be seen in the case of the indulgences granted by Leo X, the proceeds of which were intended for the construction of St. Peter's basilica at Rome. This indulgence provided Luther, who had already drifted away from the Church, with an occasion for entering the lists against indulgences as such, and not merely the abuse of them.

Bishop Albrecht of Brandenburg, who governed the dioceses of Magdeburg and Halberstadt, a thoroughly worldly-minded ecclesiastic, had succeeded in having himself elected archbishop of Mayence. In order to unite these three bishoprics in one hand, he had to contribute no less than 10,000 ducats to the Roman curia. In addition to this, he was obliged to pay 14,000 ducats for the confirmation of his appointment as archbishop of Mayence and for the pallium. It was agreed that he might preach the indulgence for the construction of St. Peter's basilica throughout his extensive jurisdic-

¹ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, pp. 324 sq. On the origin and the early development of indulgences cf. the excellent work of N. Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter*, 3 vols., Paderborn, 1922-1923.

² N. Paulus, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 265 sqq., Vol. III, pp. 450 sqq., 471 sqq.

tion in Germany, retaining one-half of the proceeds to reimburse himself for the 10,000 ducats, which he had borrowed from the Augsburg firm of the Fuggers, whilst the other half was to be devoted to the erection of St. Peter's at Rome. Albrecht kept a sharp eye on the filling of the big indulgence chest which accompanied the preachers and was placed under the supervision of the Fuggers. It was a rather disedifying transaction. Even if it did not involve simony, strictly speaking, it was nevertheless reprehensible, and can be explained only as a result of the evil financial practices of the time, which had taken root also in Rome, and of the activities of the agents of Albrecht and an avaricious party of Florentine churchmen at the curia.³

Only gradually did Luther become aware of these agreements. The first motive of his intervention was supplied by his exasperation at the new indulgence enterprise and at the existing abuses in general. He personally witnessed an example of the general decline of the system of indulgences. In the castle-church the Elector of Saxony, Frederick "the Wise," kept a casket of relics, partly genuine and partly spurious, for which he succeeded in obtaining incredibly rich indulgences from Rome. Like the Elector Albrecht of Brandenburg, Frederick was a passionate collector of relics. Both were eager to have each relic enriched with great indulgences, so as to attract pious votaries and realize handsome profits at the annual exhibition. Up to the year 1518, Frederick succeeded in obtaining for his sacred casket in the castle-church of Wittenberg indulgences which amounted, all told, to 127,799 years.

Princely interests played a nefarious rôle in connection with the indulgence traffic of the Roman curia. Occasionally the rulers prohibited the too frequent indulgence-preaching within their territories, because they wished to prevent the flow to Rome of money which they needed for their own countries, or its expenditure for other purposes not agreeable to them. Thus the Elector Frederick prohibited the promulgation of the Mayence indulgence in behalf of St. Peter's within the confines of his principality.

Elector Albrecht selected John Tetzel, a popular orator of the Dominican Order, to preach the indulgence at Mayence. Tetzel was not much of a theologian. His morals were beyond reproach, de-

³ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, pp. 347 sqq.

spite the slanders to which he was subjected in the ensuing controversy. In his sermons, which were attended by large numbers of people, he adhered to the explicit directions of the ecclesiastical authorities of Mayence, although he was unable to abstain from rhetorical exaggerations. The directions of the Mayence authorities adequately emphasized that an indulgence is a remission of punishment, not of sin, and expressly required a contrite confession as a condition. In one respect, however, the directions were defective. They declared that an indulgence applicable to the dead became efficacious upon the performance of the prescribed good work, regardless of whether one was in the state of sanctifying grace or not. Some theologians held this opinion and it was embodied in several other episcopal instructions. The problems arising from the Church's teaching on indulgences had not yet all been clearly solved. The very nature of indulgences had not yet been dogmatically defined. It was a matter of practice, taught by the theologians; but its genuineness was warranted by the ordinary teaching authority of the Church (*magisterium ecclesiae ordinarium*).

Tetzel eagerly availed himself of the above-described, now abandoned, opinion concerning indulgences for the departed. It cannot be proved that he used the famous saw which has been attributed to him: "As soon as money in the casket rings—The soul its flight from Purgatory wings," but in substance his words approximated the proverb. Some critics looked with disfavor on Tetzel because he often, e. g., at Annaberg, availed himself of the occasion of fairs with their secular amusements to proclaim the papal indulgence.⁴

There is an unwarranted report to the effect that when Staupitz had apprised him at Grimma of Tetzel's conduct, Luther exclaimed: "I shall put an abrupt stop to this, please God." When Tetzel, in the course of his preaching tour, had arrived at the confines of the electorate and in the vicinity of Wittenberg, Luther decided that the time for intervention had come. On November 1, the castle-church at Wittenberg celebrated its titular feast. The church was dedicated to All Saints and was specially indulged for that day. Many worshipers were sure to attend. On the eve of All Saints, Luther caused a Latin placard containing ninety-five theses on the subject of

⁴ Cf. N. Paulus, *Johann Tetzel, der Ablassprediger*, Mayence, 1899; Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, pp. 341 sq.; Vol. IV, pp. 84 sq.

indulgences to be nailed to the door of the church, which was, at the same time, the university chapel.

The placard contained an invitation to a disputation. At first the Latin placard did not attract much attention except among scholars. But when Luther sent copies of it to the theologians of the neighboring universities of Leipsic, Frankfort on the Oder, and Erfurt, his theses began to attract attention. That they "spread throughout Germany in fourteen days" is "an erroneous representation, based on a later expression of Luther."⁵ It is in keeping with the fables which have accumulated around the history of the theses. It is true that many, including well-intentioned but short-sighted Catholics, rejoiced that a courageous protest had been raised against the prevalent abuses in connection with the preaching of indulgences. Under the pressure of these abuses, the true meaning and import of the theses were easily overlooked.

Luther's placard was a challenge to a disputation designed to clarify a set of theses which constituted a fundamental, though guarded, attack on the Catholic doctrine of indulgences. The author had no intention of abandoning them in a learned discussion. His theological position would not permit of this. But he did not allow his novel dogmatic teaching, which stood behind the 95 theses, to appear on the surface. He maintained in his theses that indulgences were invalid before God, but were to be regarded only as a remission of the canonical penances imposed by the Church. He denied the doctrine of the treasury of merits earned by Christ and the saints, which constitutes the presupposition of indulgences. In addition to other erroneous views he expresses false notions about the condition of the departed. In defense of his attitude he seeks to place the absurdities of the indulgence preachers in the forefront as the reason and the subject of his theses. He goes so far as to say: "Let him who contradicts the truth of the papal indulgences be anathema and accursed"; and: "Bishops and priests are obligated to receive the commissioners of the papal indulgences with all due reverence." One sneering thesis asks: "Why does not the pope build the basilica of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with that of the poor, seeing that he is wealthier to-day than the richest Croesus?" Towards the close he clothes his own sharp objections in the artificial garb of a suggestion to the effect that the objections of the laity against the pope and the

⁵ Paul Kalkoff, *Luther und die Entscheidungsjahre der Reformation*, 1917, p. 22.

eleemosynary system ought to be clearly and thoroughly refuted, adding that "if sermons were preached after the mind and intention of the pope, these difficulties would be solved." In this manner the author of the theses thought he could, in a measure, safeguard his position.

Not to omit Mysticism, the last theses enjoin the obligation of striving not for the peace which indulgences seem to bring, but for the cross. Not *pax, pax*, should be the watchword, but *crux, crux*. "Christians must follow their Leader through suffering, death, and the pains of hell" (*per poenas, mortes, infernosque*). This corresponds with the idea, likewise expressed in the theses, that it is better voluntarily to suffer the penalties of sin than to escape them by means of indulgences. He also proclaimed (which was a general truth valid in all ages), that a Christian's entire life, according to the will of Christ, should be one continuous atonement.

The celebrated 95 theses are not a candid or an honest document. Neither are they a scientifically constructed or properly co-ordinated whole. Least of all, are they the programme of a reformation, as they are often represented to be.

The movement gradually assumed great dimensions. On the sixteenth of January, 1518, the eve of the feast of the dedication of the castle-church, Luther delivered in that church a sermon on indulgences which was in conformity with his theses.⁶

In a letter to Staupitz he laments in exaggerated language that "godless, false, and heretical doctrines" were propounded with such confidence in sermons on indulgences, that objectors were forthwith declared worthy of the stake. He, on the contrary, had modestly advanced his deviating opinions, which were "founded on the conviction of all the doctors and the entire Church, that it is better to make atonement than to seek for satisfaction by means of indulgences." Thereby he had invited the frightful wrath of the fanatical representatives of papal authority.⁷

We must not overlook the fact that some months before the publication of Luther's theses, Karlstadt had published 152 theses in conformity with the new doctrine. It seems Luther did not wish to be outstripped by his audacious friend. The controversy concerning in-

⁶ N. Paulus in the *Zeitschrift für kath. Theologie*, 1924, pp. 630 sqq.

⁷ *Briefwechsel*, I, p. 198.

dulgences, moreover, afforded him an opportunity of assuming the leadership of the Wittenberg movement in a popular field.

Soon after the posting of his theses, Luther wrote to the Archbishop of Mayence and to Jerome Schultz (Scultetus), bishop of Brandenburg, to whose jurisdiction Wittenberg was subject, in order to give an account of the events as he saw them. Archbishop Albrecht was also informed by the Dominicans, Tetzel and the brethren of his Order, and, for the sake of his own indulgence, immediately brought the matter before the supreme tribunal of the Church at Rome, by submitting a copy of the 95 theses and those of the disputation of September 4, 1517. Thereupon, on February 3, 1518, an Augustinian, Gabriel della Volta, was commissioned by Leo X, as representative of the General of the Augustinians, to charge Luther's superiors with the task of severely dissuading him from his perverted opinions, "lest a greater conflagration ensue as a result of negligence." It cannot be proved that the Pope originally styled the controversy an empty "quarrel between monks." Strict orders were issued by Della Volta to Staupitz, who, however, was not inclined to adopt thorough-going measures—an attitude which can easily be explained in view of his previous relations with Luther. Luther confidently wrote to him on March 31, 1518: "When God acts, no one can prevent Him; when He rests, no one is able to awaken Him."⁸ Della Volta meanwhile summoned him to appear before the imminent chapter of his Order at Heidelberg, to give an account of himself. There a district vicar was to be selected to succeed him, since his three years' term of office had expired.

On the other side Tetzel and the Dominicans were not satisfied with a defense of their preaching. At Frankfort on the Oder, Tetzel published a series of theses on the doctrine of indulgences, which were couched in a moderate form and, generally speaking, correctly reflected the position of the Church. They were composed by Conrad Wimpina, a professor of that city, who afterwards became a literary opponent of Luther. Maintaining his position, Luther replied in a pointed sermon on indulgences and grace. Tetzel defended himself, again in a moderate form, in a printed "representation," in which he stressed Luther's violation of the papal authority. He published a second series of theses, which, in turn, were followed by Luther's

⁸ *Briefwechsel*, I, p. 176.

booklet entitled: "Freedom of a Sermon on Indulgences."⁹ It was written in a more provocative tone than Luther had thus far used.

The first outsider to enter the lists was Dr. John Eck, who was destined to achieve celebrity in his subsequent controversy with Luther. He was a professor of the university of Ingolstadt, a quick-witted humanist and theologian. He circulated "Obelisci," *i.e.*, annotations to Luther's theses in manuscript. Luther replied with "Asterisci," which were also originally circulated in manuscript form.

As the time for the chapter at Heidelberg approached, April, 1518, Luther undertook to safeguard his position. In the event of his refusal to recant, he had to fear that he would be delivered up to the ecclesiastical authorities—for such was the procedure of medieval jurisprudence—and in the event of obstinacy would be confronted with the severest ecclesiastical penalties. He procured from the Elector Frederick of Saxony an order for his unmolested return to Wittenberg. It was the first demonstration in behalf of Luther on the part of that ruler, whose friendship was destined to increase with the coming years.

The members of the chapter, or at least a majority of them, were favorably inclined towards Luther and the result of their deliberations was a verdict in favor of the defendant. It was a result entirely contrary to the expectations of the Roman authorities of his Order.¹⁰ He was even granted the privilege of arranging a great disputation in the auditorium of the Augustinian monastery, which was conducted by Leonard Beier, a Wittenberg master. University professors and many guests attended. Beier and Luther argued against free will and the ancient theology. One of the Wittenberg professors who were in attendance interrupted the disputants when certain strong declarations were made, exclaiming: "If the peasants could hear this, they would stone you!" The Heidelberg chapter, so far as can be inferred, did not treat the problem of indulgences. Luther, now regarded as a courageous ornament of his Order, remained unmolested. Among the students of theology at the university, several were more or less won over by him. Some of them later on became

⁹ On the correspondence between Luther and Tetzel see Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 372 sqq., where the calm and heavy publications of Tetzel are compared with Luther's first impetuous polemical broadsides.

¹⁰ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, p. 334.

his helpers, such as John Brenz and Erhard Schnepf, and particularly Martin Butzer (Bucer), a talented young Dominican endowed with a very lively temperament.

On his homeward journey, Luther, who was delighted with the issue, delivered a sermon in Dresden in the presence of Duke George of Saxony and his court. He discoursed on the grace of Christ, eternal salvation, and the conquest of fear before an angry God. The duke, who was loyal to the Church, took great offense at these remarks. Several others also were indignant. When Luther heard of their objections, he disposed of them in these self-conscious words: These babblers desire everything and can do nothing; they are "a serpent's brood," "masked faces" whom I will ignore.¹¹

His arrogance increased because of his having escaped punishment, because of the approval he met with, and because of the expected protection of the Elector Frederick. At the same time his writings and letters of those days reveal how he ever and anon calls up before his mind the abuses actually existing within the Church, especially the lucrative practices of the bishops and the Roman curia, in order to encourage himself and excite his anger. Unfortunately, the abuses furnished him with what he wanted. Oldecop, who was his pupil at that time, thus describes Luther's attacks which he continued at home, on the indulgence traffic and the doctrine of indulgences itself: "In his teaching against them, he exceeded all bounds, indulging in every kind of rage and blasphemy." He describes him on this occasion as "naturally proud and presumptuous." In a statement on indulgences and grace, composed at the behest of members of the Heidelberg chapter, Luther assured them that in his theses on indulgences he had spoken only by way of disputation, to ascertain the truth. In this way he constantly concealed his real opinion. However, in the "Resolutions" which he published in connection with his theses he expressed his attitude unequivocally. These Resolutions or "explanations" were intended to elucidate, defend, and confirm the entire series of theses. No dogmatic definition on indulgences having been issued, he pretended that there was no binding doctrine on the subject proposed by the *magisterium ordinarium* of the Church. He now proclaimed to the world his new doctrine on grace in a more definite outline.¹² He conceived the bold idea of dedicating his

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 335, 378 sq.

"Resolutions" to Pope Leo, and of forwarding them to Rome through Staupitz. He prefaced the work with an humble dedicatory epistle addressed to the head of the Church. Couched in superlative phraseology, it was designed to be an *apologia* of his conduct and an attack on his opponents. True, he tersely says: "I cannot recant," but towards the end of the epistle he bursts forth with the assurance: "Most Holy Father! I prostrate myself before thy feet, and offer myself to thee with all that I am and possess. Do as thou wilt; give life or death, call or recall, approve or disapprove; I will acknowledge thy voice as the voice of Christ who reigneth and speaketh in thee. If I have merited death, I shall not refuse to die."¹³ How is this language to be explained? It constitutes one of the many riddles of his psychology. It need not be taken as hypocrisy, but is, rather, a reflection of the restless and profound struggles which buffeted him about between loyalty to the Church and the new position which he had assumed. It is possible that he wished to dispose the pope favorably and he may also have intended to allay the alarm of his many Catholic readers both at home and abroad. Nevertheless, a considerable lack of spiritual equilibrium is plainly noticeable. When his imagination is deeply roused, the ideas which agitate him at the moment often assume most exaggerated forms, but later are in turn easily displaced by contrary and equally vivid ideas. Concerning the pangs of conscience which afflicted him at the beginning of his revolt, he expressed himself thus on one occasion: "I was not happy or confident concerning that undertaking."—"What my heart suffered in the first and second year, and how I lay prostrate on the ground, nay, almost despaired, they [my opponents] did not know, who themselves afterwards attacked the pope with equal audacity." They were, he said, "ignorant of the cross and of Satan," whereas he "was compelled to go through terrible death-struggles and temptations."

In a remarkable passage of the "Resolutions" he describes these phenomena in detail, though he is not aware that his qualms of conscience are closely related to the neurotic precordial fear which he frequently suffered.

Apropos of indulgences for the departed, he wishes to picture the spiritual agonies of the souls in Purgatory, which were understood very well by such

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 335; *Briefwechsel*, I, pp. 200 sq.

as at one time or another had suffered similar pains, but of which the indulgence-preachers had no conception. Then he proceeds in fantastic language: That eminent doctor [Tauler] with whom the Scholastic theologians are not familiar, speaks of such "dark nights of the soul"; and he himself is acquainted with one so afflicted (*i. e.*, himself; 2 Cor. XII, 2). The agonies are very brief, but so intense and infernal that no tongue can express, no pen can describe, no uninitiate can believe them. Were they to last but the tenth part of an hour, all of a man's bones would be reduced to ashes. "God, and simultaneously with Him, all creation, appears horribly angry. There is no escape, no comfort, whether within or without, only a hollow accusing voice." The sufferer regards himself as a reprobate, and does not even dare to say with the Psalmist: O Lord, rebuke not me in Thy indignation. He believes that he is saved, but suffers eternal punishment, and feels himself stretched on the cross with Christ, so that all his bones are numbered. There is not a nook of the soul that is not filled with bitter anguish, with terror, dread and sadness, accompanied by the stifling sense that it is to last forever. In order to make a weak comparison: when a bullet traces a line, every point in that line sustains the whole bullet, but it does not compass the whole bullet. Thus the soul feels when that deluge of eternity flows over it and drinks naught else but eternal pain; but this pain does not abide; it passes away. It is an infernal torture, an intolerable terror which excludes all consolation! Those who have experienced it must be believed.¹⁴

This is the language of a sick man. Here Luther actually depicts those phobias of traumatic neurosis which nervous persons experience as a result of a terrible shock. We must regard them as after-effects of the thunderbolt of Stotternheim. In his own opinion they were that darkness of soul so familiar to mystics. In his case physical fear was intimately associated with tortures of conscience, his internal doubts and that abiding sense of fear, in which he imagined God to be "horribly angry." In their most aggravated form, they were movements of precordial fear. Such psychopathic conditions were not adequately known to the medical science of his day. It was no pressure of circular "psychosis" which affected Luther in his monastic years, as a popular Protestant biographer would have us believe, who holds that monastic practices as such, when strictly and conscientiously performed, ordinarily induce a certain degree of

¹⁴ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, pp. 381 sq.; VI, 102; *Werke*, Weimar ed., I, p. 557; *Opp. Lat. Var.*, II, p. 180.

insanity.¹⁵ Insanity cannot be ascribed in any sense to Luther while he was a monk. If one correctly understands his manifold testimonies, he simply experienced the effects of extreme nervousness from early youth to old age.

The "Resolutions" were followed by a tract on the "Force of Excommunication." It was inspired by anxiety about the condemnatory verdict of the pope. In order to allay his own fears as well as the fears of others, he wished to show that an unjust excommunication does not separate one from the soul of the Church. To justify his conduct he describes in lurid colors the abuses which attended the all too frequent use of the power of excommunication by the bishops.

2. THE HEARING AT AUGSBURG. MILTITZ

The German Dominicans reported to the Roman curia fresh accusations against the impetuous Augustinian. A certain rivalry between these two great and influential bodies may have to some extent prompted this procedure; but it was not the decisive motive. Older Catholic authors, relying too confidently on contemporaneous verdicts, have mistakenly endeavored to trace the origin of the religious schism to the jealousy that existed between the Dominican and the Augustinian orders, inasmuch as the former espoused the cause of Tetzel and his indulgence sermons, whereas the latter rose in defense of Luther and his courageous utterances. Whatever may have been in the background, as far as the attitude of Rome was concerned, the documents which were before the papal curia, namely, the Wittenberg theses, the disputationes conducted there, the Heidelberg theses of Luther, and his "*Resolutiones*," decided the issue.

The Pope, acting in conformity with the law, through his fiscal procurator and the auditor of the camera, cited Luther to Rome, where he was to present himself within sixty days. At the same time, the theologian of the sacred palace (*magister sacri palatii*), the Dominican Sylvester Mazzolini, a native of Prierio (therefore called Prierias), was entrusted with the task of preparing an expert opinion. As he had evidently been exactly informed of the case some time before, he completed his task within three days. His printed opinion was a complete *apologia* for Tetzel and his teaching on indulgences.

¹⁵ Adolph Hausrath; cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, p. 383.

He employed unnecessarily bitter expressions against Luther—following a custom in vogue in those times of controversies against heretics. He placed special emphasis on the power of the pope and his right of definitively deciding all ecclesiastical questions, which he set forth in most forceful terms.¹⁶ When Sylvester's pamphlet with the citation to Rome reached Luther, he realized to his consternation, as he tells us, how serious the situation really was. He made a hasty, all too hasty, decision and published an indignant response (*Responsio*) to Prierias.¹⁷ Relative to the citation, he on the very next day issued a written appeal for help to the Elector, requesting that dignitary to insist that the case be tried in Germany. Frederick "the Wise" was in attendance at the diet of Augsburg at the time.

This diet was also attended by the papal legate, Cardinal Cajetan de Vio, a highly respected Dominican theologian. The Elector told him that he would not let his university professor go to Rome. In the meantime (August 9), the Emperor Maximilian had sent a vigorous letter to the Pope, assuring him that he would execute the decision of the Holy See against Luther with all his energy. Luther's efforts to prevent this course had proved futile. Assured of imperial support, the curia decided to accelerate the procedure against the growing evil. It was also intended to comply with the request of the Elector to have the hearing conducted in Germany in order to secure the help of this powerful prince in the war against the Turks. For this reason Cardinal Cajetan received orders from Rome to summon Luther to appear before him in person to recant his errors. The order was accompanied by another, to the effect that Luther, in the event of his refusal to recant, should be apprehended forthwith and delivered to the Roman authorities. The Elector and the provincial of the Saxon Augustinians received simultaneous orders to assist in apprehending Luther in case such a measure should become necessary. On September 11, the legate received a further document from Rome, empowering him to conduct the case against Luther according to his own discretion.

Luther appeared before Cajetan at Augsburg, on October 12. The first hearing and the subsequent meetings were fruitless. With moderation and dignity Cajetan demanded the retraction of two theses of Luther's: one denying the treasury of merits gained by

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 373 sq.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, Vol. IV, 374 sq.

Christ and the Saints, which was the foundation of the doctrine of indulgences; the other, contained in the "*Resolutiones*," asserting that faith alone renders the Sacraments of the Church efficacious. He disregarded the other theses because, although false, they did not so patently offend against theological truths. As to the treasury of merits, many theologians, among them Cajetan himself, held that it had already been defined by Pope Clement VI. In any event, like the independent efficacy of the Sacraments, it constituted an important doctrine of theology.

Despite all his kindness and determined earnestness, Cardinal Cajetan's efforts proved futile. Luther manifested arrogance and offensive obstinacy. Dismissed with the threat of excommunication, he announced to the Cardinal that he would appeal from his tribunal "to the Pope, who would be more correctly informed." To others he said that this was but a preparation for an appeal to a general council, which was bound to follow in case the Pope, "in the plenitude of his authority, or rather tyranny," would reject his appellation. Luther did not tarry for a reply from the hesitating Cardinal, but secretly fled from the city and hastened back to Wittenberg.

The Cardinal had also made advances to the Elector, in order to influence his attitude regarding the election of a German king in conformity with the intentions of Rome. Frederick subsequently asserted that he had obtained from Cajetan the promise that Luther would be returned to Germany in any event. It is certain that the scholarly and gentle prince of the Church was no match for the cunning diplomacy of the Elector.

The formerly popular legend of Cajetan's haughty treatment of Luther is now admitted to be unhistorical even by Protestant writers. The Cardinal is described as "humble, just, and self-sacrificing" and his conduct towards Luther as dignified; he is admitted to have been "an earnest and, in his judgment concerning the abuses prevalent at the curia, a strict and free-spoken thinker."¹⁸ Luther, on the contrary, accuses him of being "most wofully ignorant" and of having treated him like a lion.¹⁹

¹⁸ Paul Kalkoff, *Luther und die Entscheidungsjahre*, pp. 57, 157; IDEM in *Kirchengesch. Forschungen*, E. Brieger dargebracht, 1912, and in the *Theol. Studien und Kritiken*, 1917, p. 246. Similarly Hermelink in the *Theol. Rundschau*, 1917, p. 141.

¹⁹ *Briefwechsel*, I, p. 282.

The question which now tormented Luther was whether he would be safe at Wittenberg. He thought of going to Paris, where the theological faculty of the University was engaged in a quarrel with Rome. But his friend Spalatin, a preacher at the court of the Elector Frederick, provided protection through that ruler. Luther entered into a lively correspondence with Spalatin, through whom he assured the prince that he would gladly go into exile rather than embarrass him through the fury of his enemies. In the interim, on November 28, he appeared before a notary and two witnesses, and drew up a solemn appeal to a general council. In the lengthy formula he declared his intention to do or say naught against the Roman Church, the teacher and head of all the churches, nor against the authority of the Pope—as long as the latter were well advised (*bene consultus*). The affidavit was signed, as the subscription of the notary attests, “in the chapel of Corpus Christi, situated in the cemetery of the parish church.” The little church was a pretty structure erected in honor of “Christ’s holy body,” such as adorned many a churchyard in those days.

Luther’s appeal to an ecumenical council, like his former appeal, was inadmissible and ineffective. According to canon law, an appeal to a council was a penal offense. This provision was justified by the answer to the question: Has any individual who wishes to create a schism within the Church the right to convoke all the bishops of the world to a council, prior to his submission?

On December 18, the Elector addressed a letter to Cardinal Cajetan, in which he disclosed to the latter the line of action he had resolved upon with reference to his protégé, and to which he always adhered. Luther’s doctrine, he said, had not as yet been proven heretical; Luther was prepared to appear before a university for a disputation and formal examination; hence, nothing could be done to him at Wittenberg. But Rome proceeded directly, though, out of regard for the Elector and his participation in the great questions of ecclesiastical policy which were then pending, it proceeded with notable slowness. At first an attempt was made to influence Frederick by sending him the Golden Rose blessed by the Pope. It was customary to send it annually to a prince as a mark of distinction. The presentation was to have been made by the Roman notary and titular chamberlain, Karl von Miltitz. The selection of this Saxon nobleman was not a happy one. Miltitz undertook his commission with great

pomp, but in the end executed it in a very ineffective manner. He was an incompetent man and a seeker of benefices.

In order to persuade Frederick to deliver up Luther, Miltitz, of his own accord, adopted wrong methods. In the Dominican monastery at Leipsic he overwhelmed Tetzel with unmerited and bitter reproaches, which are said to have hastened his death. Luther consented to make a doubtful promise to the importunate agent, who exceeded his commission, namely, to observe silence if his opponents did the same. There could be no question of a general silence on the Catholic side in view of the ever increasing dangers that threatened the Church; and, on the other hand, Luther was far from expecting his opponents to observe silence, or from being silent himself. Under the influence of Miltitz, Luther at that time published a curious work under the title of "*Unterricht*" (Instructions), etc., which contained both affirmations and negations, in order to conciliate his opponents.

Miltitz sent boastful reports of the success of his efforts to the Roma curia, and they were not entirely devoid of effect. The death of Emperor Maximilian, on January 12, 1519, and the fact that Frederick of Saxony had some prospects of becoming emperor, supplied Leo X with a reason for new delays. Finally the Pope, in a friendly brief (*Paterno affectu*), issued March 29, 1519, summoned Luther to Rome to receive personal instructions and abandon his erroneous doctrines. It cannot be proved that the treatment accorded Luther was severe and ill-considered. When the brief arrived, steps had already been taken by Luther for the Leipsic disputation, which destroyed every hope of arriving at an understanding. At Rome this measure occasioned the termination of the trial which had already been too long drawn out.

Luther's pen was not exclusively devoted to attacks. With impetuous activity he had in the meanwhile composed a series of tracts which, beside those mentioned above, were dedicated in part to a glorification of his cause, and in part written to pastoral requirements. His popular religious writings were intended to invest him with the indispensable reputation of a man who was solicitous solely about the welfare of souls. This activity gained for him a large following among religious-minded people. Among other things he published, in that period of stress, a serviceable explanation of the Our Father, a short instruction on confession, a condensed explanation of the Decalogue, and an interpretation of Psalm CIX (Vulg. CX). Even

before this he had entered the field of popular literature with an exposition of the seven penitential Psalms, a sermon on the Ten Commandments, and some other smaller writings.

His history of the Augsburg trial (*Acta Augustana*), on the other hand, as well as his edition of the "Replica" of Sylvester Prierias against his "Responses," were polemical. By publishing a reprint of the "Replica" of the Master of the Sacred Palace, he intended to represent Prierias as a man entirely devoid of importance and worthy of disdain.²⁰

3. THE DISCOVERY IN THE TOWER

An essential element was still missing in the new theology, as it appears in Luther's exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in his early disputations, and in the writings which he had thus far published.

He was unable to discover an adequate answer to the distressing question: How can we be personally certain that Christ's merits are imputed to us, and that we are in a state of grace? The Church told him that whoever sought justification by true penance, should be certain of it. Faithful souls in a normal state were not tortured by doubts on this point; but they did not conceive this certitude as really a certitude of faith in the strict and proper sense, as an object of revelation, which would have been erroneous. However, the teaching of the Church and her practice did not satisfy the restless soul of Luther; nor was he content with the results of his own study. His demand of perfect surrender (*humilitas*) to almighty God, coupled with resignation to whatever He might decree, appeared insufficient even to himself to engender that perfect certainty of the state of grace for which he longed. The reason was that his God was the arbitrary God of Ockhamism.

Hence, he conceded, in painful language, the endurance, yea the increase of his fear of a wrathful and avenging Deity. The word *justitia*, he said, had ever persecuted him and often entered into his soul like a flash of lightning.²¹ Fear agitated the morbid substratum of his soul. He assures us that he felt most distressed at the time he was about to deliver his second series of lectures on the Psalms. It

²⁰ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, p. 375.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 374 sqq.

was synchronous with his appeal to a general council, in the winter semester of 1518 to 1519. Beginning with 1516, one is able to see how, step by step, he gradually advances toward the conclusions which he had laid down in his second exposition of the Psalms, namely, the dogmatic certitude of personal justification. In the works which he published in 1518 he confidently announces this result. The publications which embody this conclusion are the second commentary on the Psalms (*Operationes in Psalmos*), the shorter explanation of the Epistle to the Galatians, and the sermons on "two-fold and threefold righteousness."²² In what manner did he arrive at this conclusion? The answer is supplied by the so-called discovery in the tower.

On various occasions during his later life, Luther spoke freely of this capital discovery. Thus in the preface to his Latin works, edition of 1545,²³ he describes how his discovery in the tower of the monastery was connected with a passage in the Epistle to the Romans (I, 17): "For the justice of God is revealed therein [i. e., in the Gospel], leading men from faith unto faith [i. e., unto the believing], according as it is written: The just shall live by faith." (Cf. Hab. II, 4).

"Until now," Luther says in the preface, "the words, 'the justice of God is revealed in the Gospel,' were an obstacle to me. For I hated the words, 'justice of God,' which I had been taught, in conformity with the usage and custom of all doctors [!], to comprehend philosophically, namely, of the so-called formal or active justice, by which God is just and punishes the sinners and the unjust. Although I was a monk without reproach, I felt myself to be a sinner in the sight of God, suffered the greatest spiritual unrest, and could not consolingly imagine God as reconciled by my atonement. Consequently, I did not love, but rather hated the just God who punished sinners." The ancient law of the Decalogue already threatened sinners with dire punishment, and now, as he understood that passage, God intended to proclaim His anger and avenging justice through the Gospel. "Thus I raved (*furebam*), and my mind conjured up terrors and confusion. Importunately I sounded the text and thirsted to know its purport." While in this frame of mind, the significance of the words, "the just man liveth by faith," suddenly became clear to him. He saw that the

²² *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 386 sqq.

²³ *Opp. Lat. Var.*, Erlangen ed., I, pp. 15 sqq. Cf. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. I, pp. 388 sqq.

"justice of God" was identical with the justice which the just and holy God bestows by means of faith upon those who are to be justified and did not denote avenging justice, as everybody else imagined. He had discovered, not active but passive justice, as he phrases it.

"I felt completely reborn and believed I was entering paradise through open portals. . . . Henceforth I praised the word justice with as much love as I had formerly pursued it with hatred." He concludes that he was confirmed in his interpretation by reading the works of St. Augustine.

Relative to Luther's assertions concerning the sequence of these events, two things should be noted. The assertions were made long after the event. The most detailed, which we have just cited, was made twenty-seven years later, after an agitated life spent in controversies. It is natural, therefore, that the revelation he claimed he had received is no longer as prominent as in other passages of his writings.²⁴ The definitely expressed content was the alleged efficacy of faith alone, namely, the absolute certitude of personal justification to be obtained from "*sola fides*," *i. e.*, the confidence engendered by faith. As a result of his later experiences and owing to the progress of his doctrines, this idea appears somewhat obscured in Luther's subsequent account. The time and place were more clearly fixed in his memory.

It is not true that "all the doctors" up to his time understood Rom. I, 17, of the avenging justice of God, and that Luther was the first to perceive the correct meaning of the phrase, namely, the concept of justice by which God makes men just. This assertion is reiterated in Luther's commentary on Genesis and was popularized by Melanchthon in his short biography of the Reformer.²⁵ The very contrary is true. Denifle has reviewed all the ancient commentators in a careful monograph²⁶ and shows "that not one Christian commentator from the days of Ambrosiaster up to the time of Luther, interpreted the Pauline passage in the sense of an avenging justice or an angry God, but that all understood it as referring to the justifying God, His justifying grace, and the former exegetes had spoken of justifica-

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, Vol. VI, pp. 504 sqq.

²⁵ *Commentar. in Genesim*, see chap. 27, *Opp. Exeg.*, VII, p. 74. Melanchthon, *Vita Lutheri* (*Corp. Ref.*), VI, p. 159.

²⁶ *Quellenbelege zu Luther und Luthertum: Die abendländischen Schriftausleger bis Luther über Iustitia Dei (Rom. I, 17) und Iustificatio*, pp. xx and 380 with quotations from 65 exegetes (Mayence, 1905).

tion of faith.”²⁷ Hence, Luther had not made a new discovery, but taught the acquisition of justice in a far different manner. Denifle also showed how tradition contradicts Luther and corroborates the ancient teaching of the Church that justification is obtained only through faith animated by charity (*fides caritate formata*) and not through the Lutheran formula *sola fide*. Luther’s assertion about the teaching of the ancient commentators can only have originated in the fact that he had not read, or else had not understood some of them we know he had read. His subsequent utterance is a sign of the self-delusion into which he gradually fell under the influence of self-interest.

It was while he was somberly meditating on Rom. I, 17, that, at the end of 1518, his mind was enlightened in a tower at the south-eastern corner of the monastery, next to the garden. In the second story of this tower there was a so-called hypocaust, *i. e.*, a furnace-room, and beneath it the toilet (*cloaca*) of the monks. The hypocaust served Luther as a study.²⁸ He mentions the tower and the *cloaca* in 1532, in a passage of his Table Talks, where he speaks of the place of his illumination. The conversation was recorded by his pupil and friend, John Schlaginhausen, who wrote down the short conversation at table for his private collection of Table Talks.²⁹ Schlaginhausen, since 1531, resided at Luther’s house, the former Augustinian monastery, as an expectant for a position as pastor. In the interval between July and September of the following year, Luther spoke in his presence of the terrors he had suffered at the thought of divine justice. While in the tower, he said, he had pondered the words: The just man lives by faith. His spirit rose and the conclusion flashed upon him: Therefore, it is God’s justice which justifies and saves us. “Those words became more gratifying to me. On this *cloaca* the Holy Ghost inspired me with this apt interpretation.”

The two references of Schlaginhausen to the Holy Ghost and the tower are repeated in the same connection by other contemporaneous collectors of Table Talks, who were not present at the conversation, but had Schlaginhausen’s manuscript before them. Thus, Conrad Cordatus reports Luther’s words as follows: “The Holy Ghost inspired

²⁷ Thus Denifle summed up the results of his investigation in *Luther und Luthertum*, 2nd ed., pp. 387 sq.

²⁸ E. Kroker in the *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 1920, pp. 300 sqq.

²⁹ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., II, p. 177, no. 1681. The word *cloaca* is represented by the letters *cl*.

me with this solution in this tower." ³⁰ He, too, lived in the same house with Luther, was familiar with the place, and adds in the introduction to Luther's words that the "privy" of the monastery was there. George Rörer, also a pupil of Luther and a most reliable collector of his *Table Talks*, quotes Luther as saying: "The spirit of God has inspired me with this interpretation on the *cloaca*." ³¹ Anton Lauterbach reports that Luther concluded his description of this event thus: "The Holy Spirit revealed the Scriptures to me in this tower." ³² The repeated use of the pronoun "this" permits the inference that it was thought that Luther indicated the tower with his finger. The hypocaust is mentioned only by Lauterbach at the beginning of the Table Talk, thus: "Once when I was reflecting in this tower and hypocaust." The question may be raised why he inserted the word *hypocaust* in Schlaginhaufen's story.

It is of little moment, whether the enlightenment came to Luther in the *cloaca* itself, as seems to have happened, or in the hypocaust, which was his study. ³³ In fact, it is of even less moment than might appear from the elaborate discussions of Protestant authors who favor the elimination of the word *cloaca* from the narrative. The matter was quite indifferent to Luther and his aforementioned pupils; only the timid Schlaginhaufen seems to have taken offense at it, since he does not write out the word in full, but only insinuates it with the letters *cl*. That he understood that the *cloaca* was meant when Luther pointed out the place, is not subject to doubt, according to the Protestant author of the new critical edition of the Table Talks, though some still place a different and deviating interpretation on the letters *cl*. ³⁴ Luther, as Kawerau emphasizes, was of the opinion that the Spirit of God has a free hand everywhere, even on the *cloaca*. ³⁵

Such was Luther's experience in the tower, of which he later says

³⁰ *Ibid.*, III, p. 228, no. 3232a.

³¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 177, n. 1. Here the word *cloaca* is written out in full.

³² *Ibid.*, III, p. 228, no. 3232c (*Bindsel, Colloquia*). Likewise Kaspar Khumer (*ib.* no. 3232b): "Diese Kunst hat mir der Heilige Geist auf dieser *cloaca* auf dem Torm gegeben."

³³ Kroker assumes the hypocaust to be the place. (*Jahrbuch* etc.; see note 34.)

³⁴ Kroker in the *Jahrbuch der Luthergesellschaft*, I (1919), pp. 112 sqq., assumes that Schlaginhaufen had misunderstood Luther. This possibility is not to be entirely excluded. Nevertheless Schlaginhaufen was quite certain, since he preferred to conceal what he had heard, yet expressed it with *cl*.

³⁵ G. Kawerau, *Luther in katholischer Beleuchtung*, Leipsic, 1911, p. 60.

that for a long time he knew not what he was about, when from the verse, "The just man lives by faith," a light burst upon him which terminated one period of his life. "Thereupon," he says, "I went through."³⁶

So much is certain: Luther's experience in the tower may claim to be one of the most important and far-reaching events of his life. In its essential features it does not permit of contradiction. The feeling of joy which Luther tells us he experienced immediately after, is quite comprehensible and does not provoke the least historical objection. Psychologically it is not only possible, but characteristic of the spirit which moved Luther. Of course, the Catholic ascetic will view the sudden emotion of joy in quite a different light than Luther's admirers.

It is evident to any impartial observer that the new theological doctrine of the certitude of salvation or, let us rather say, the certainty of justification, was a deduction completely adapted to Luther's state of mind, as it soothed him in his sad personal struggle. He erected it into an article of faith, to be believed by all. That one must firmly believe that one is in the state of grace became a dogma of the Lutheran faith.

In a similar manner Luther erected the personal experiences of his own way of suffering into a general norm for all. Even at that time he taught—and always adhered to this doctrine—that God leads those whom He wishes to justify, through darkness and fears; that the road of despondency *per se* leads to salvation. On one occasion he wrote that no man has a right to converse about divine things unless he has experienced those things, and among those who have not he classes the papists and the visionaries who deviated from his doctrine.

But Luther was not able to maintain himself in the certainty to attain which cost him so much labor. In the sequel he often admitted, sorrowfully, that this was not possible for him except at the cost of severe trials and ever new struggles.³⁷ He instructed all that life is nothing but a laborious contest for this ineffable good and that assurance of grace depends on vigorous endeavors and daring defiance, which, however, are not everyman's business.

³⁶ *Tischbreden*, Weimar ed., V, no. 5518.

³⁷ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, Ch. XXXII, especially no. 6.

4. THE LEIPSIC DISPUTATION OF 1519 AND THE PAPAL PRIMACY

After Luther's trial at Augsburg, the controversy about indulgences began to wane before other more important questions connected with his revolt. Among these the primacy of the pope gradually began to take precedence.

While the subject of indulgences was still burning, Cardinal Cajetan had availed himself of his stay at Augsburg to compose a series of scholarly treatises on the doctrine of indulgences.³⁸ He also drew up a scheme for a doctrinal decree of Leo X on this question. This highly important papal decree, which definitely determined the traditional teaching of the Church, appeared on November 9, 1518.³⁹ Cajetan, who was an excellent commentator of St. Thomas Aquinas, also perceived the importance of the doctrine of the primacy in view of the progress of the Lutheran controversy. He began the composition of a scholarly work, *On the Divine Institution of the Roman Pontificate over the Universal Church*, which appeared in 1521 and was immediately reprinted at Cologne by Peter Quentell.⁴⁰

John Eck, a theologian of Ingolstadt, shared Cajetan's conviction that the question of papal supremacy would become the real and decisive battleground for the future. The Catholic cause is indebted to his versatile and powerful pen for the comprehensive Latin work, *Of the Primacy of Peter, Three Books against Ludder*, which originally appeared at Ingolstadt in 1520.⁴¹

In defending the spiritual supremacy of the successors of St. Peter in Rome, both writers, the Italian and the German, appealed most emphatically with the entire Catholic tradition to Christ's words addressed to the Apostle after the latter had solemnly professed his faith in His divinity: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi, 18). They likewise quoted the immortal words of the Saviour, when, after His resurrection, He confided His sheep to the pastoral care of Peter on the shores of Lake Tiberias: "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep" (John xxi, 15 sqq.). By means of this concept of the Church, founded

³⁸ F. Lauchert, *Die italienischen Gegner Luthers*, 1918, p. 141.

³⁹ Kalkhoff, *Luther und die Entscheidungsjahre*, pp. 86-88.

⁴⁰ Lauchert, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-155.

⁴¹ Wiedemann, *Dr. Job. Eck*, 1865, p. 517.

by Christ as the visible spiritual kingdom of the faithful, they furthermore demonstrated that, subject to its invisible Head, namely, the Son of God, there must be a visible head to govern this spiritual society, in order to bind its members in the necessary unity and to preserve it from dissolution. They appealed to the history of the Church from the time of its inception for illuminating proofs of the fact that the successors of St. Peter in the see of Rome had always possessed the supreme power in governing the Church, though a progressive development in the use of that power must be acknowledged. They emphasized that all centuries, up to their own, were replete with most glorious achievements on the part of the papacy, though there had been a few unworthy popes. Guided by God, the papacy had conferred upon mankind the golden gifts of Christian civilization and culture, resisted the arrogance of mighty rulers, protected the rights of the lowly, and raised the heart of humanity to celestial things. Finally, they maintained, it was a crime against the will of Christ, against the foundation of the divine temple of the Church, against the duty of gratitude towards the society of the faithful which had been nurtured by the papacy, to attack the rights of the occupant of the Holy See.

John Eck, the most successful and most celebrated defender of the papacy against Luther in Germany, was born in the town of Eck in Swabia. His real name was John Mayr. In 1510 he became a professor at the University of Ingolstadt and, at the same time, canon of the cathedral of Eichstätt. Thoroughly conversant with humanism, this learned theologian corresponded with a large number of the most prominent men of the age. He was known for his cleverness in scientific discussions, was well-read and endowed with a stupendous memory. These gifts were supplemented by extraordinary physical powers; he was a gigantic man who, when engaged in disputation, was wont to dominate the situation with his stentorian voice.

In May, 1518, Karlstadt had published a series of theses against Eck's "Obelisci" at Wittenberg. Eck not only replied with a set of other theses, but challenged him to a public disputation, to be conducted at one of the great university cities, Rome, Paris, or Cologne. Leipsic was finally selected, and Eck endeavored to obtain the consent of Duke George, who was reputed to be a great patron of scholarly pursuits. Prior to the meeting, however, Eck published twelve theses, which were expressly, though somewhat covertly, directed

against the person of Luther and his doctrines. The final thesis dealt with the Roman primacy. Luther, in the "Resolutions" which he had appended to his theses on indulgences, had asserted (though without denying the rights of the existing primacy) that he knew of no primacy of Rome over the universal Church, at least not over the Oriental Church, before the time of Gregory the Great, *i. e.*, about the year 600. Eck in his final thesis against Luther says: "We deny that the Roman Church had no precedence over the other churches before the age of Sylvester (died 335), and acknowledge him who occupies the see of St. Peter as the successor of Peter and the universal vicegerent of Christ." Luther indignantly declared that he was the one who had been challenged to the projected disputation. In this he was not entirely wrong. Nevertheless he made up his mind to participate in the Leipsic discussion. In the beginning of February, 1519, he published twelve antitheses against Eck, and soon after, boldly added a thirteenth against the authority of the pope. Although his most intimate friends had hitherto cautioned him not to revolt against Rome, "the thirteenth thesis appears entirely too audacious, nay, absolutely untenable, even to more recent Protestant writers."⁴² This thesis declared that his opponents could base their proofs for the primacy only on the "frosty decretals of the last four centuries."

Luther expected to take part in the disputation and to surprise his opponents with historical arguments. Accordingly, he delved into history to discover proofs for the negation, which, as far as he was concerned, was irrefragable even without proofs. In his letters of that period he repeatedly spoke of the hydra of the papacy, against which it was his duty to launch an attack. His previous activities, he said, now appeared to him as mere child's-play by comparison. "The Lord pulls me, and I follow Him not unwillingly." In this pseudo-mystical frame of mind—led by the hand of God, as he imagined—he arrived historically and Scripturally at the discovery that the pope was Antichrist.⁴³ He finds that the mysterious words in the second chapter of Thessalonians, and those in the first Epistle of St. John (ii, 18) on the advent of Antichrist, are not applicable to a particular person, as tradition would have it, but to the papacy as an institution, whose anti-Christian nature, now that the end of the world was nigh, must be exposed by him, the witness chosen of God.

⁴² Köstlin-Kawerau, *Martin Luther*, 5th ed., Berlin, 1903, Vol. I, p. 235.

⁴³ Cf. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, pp. 142 sqq.

This idea, which was to control his later life, soon struck deep roots in him.

On December 11, 1518, he announced his "presentiment" to Wenceslaus Link. In a letter of March 13, 1519, addressed to his friend and helper at the Electoral court, Spalatin, he speaks more clearly: "In connexion with my disputation, I am reviewing the decretals of the popes, and—I whisper it into your ear—am uncertain whether the pope is himself Antichrist, or an apostle of Antichrist, so awfully is Christ, *i. e.*, the truth, crucified in the decretals." He penned these lines only two months after he had addressed his fawning letter of submission to Pope Leo. Soon the mask drops from his face entirely. Without awaiting the disputation, he publishes his conclusions in a set of Latin "Resolutions" on the aforementioned thirteenth thesis, in which he complains that no one wishes to acknowledge that Anti-christ "sitteth in the temple of God at Rome." (2 Thess. ii, 4).

The day of the disputation was approaching, and as yet Luther had not been invited. Duke George of Saxony was still opposed to his taking part in it. Some of the bishops attempted to prevent the disputation, because, no matter what its outcome might be, in their opinion it would only serve to spread the innovations, and because the final decision lay solely with the supreme ecclesiastical tribunal. Their efforts, however, were futile.

Impelled by an intense desire to fight, Luther accompanied his friend Karlstadt to Leipsic, where, at the last moment, he was permitted to participate in the disputation. He afterwards said that he entered the disputation under the aegis of Karlstadt. The oratorical contest began June 27, in the great aula of the Pleissenburg, in the presence of the duke and his court, the professors of the university, and many other scholars who had come from far and near.

Karlstadt had first to dispute with Eck. The disputation between these two men, mainly on free will, lasted up to July 2, inclusively. Karlstadt showed himself inferior to Eck in versatility and knowledge. He was small of stature and his voice was hoarse; he was often timid. The audience became bored because his defective memory compelled him to consult books to prove his assertions. The weather was hot and quite a number of professors fell asleep.

The audience was aroused when, on July 4, Luther appeared at the lecturer's desk with a bouquet in his hand, which he, from time to time, held to his nose, after the manner of one who pretends superior-

ity. His finger was adorned with a shining silver ring. For the rest he wore his monastic habit. Mosellanus (Peter Schade of Bruttig), the humanist, who was present, says that, seeing his medium-sized slender frame, one was almost able to count Luther's bones, a condition resulting from worry, study, and labor. He also reports that Luther spoke in a high, clear voice. Tradition has it that he distinguished himself by an extraordinary adroitness in the use of Scriptural texts. He did not measure up to the clarity and demonstrative force of Eck, who, moreover, by his ready wit and acuteness in detecting contradictions, defects and sudden transitions, showed up many a weak point in Luther's argument. This is proved by the report of the proceedings drawn up by the notaries who were present.

The two disputants were supposed to discuss, in turn, the papacy, indulgences, Purgatory, and other controversial topics. However, the debate on the papacy consumed almost the entire time. Shrewdly appraising the situation, Eck, on July 5, cited the ecumenical Council of Constance, which had condemned Hus as a heretic for denying the primacy. He did this in order to compel Luther to make a definite profession of faith. Luther at first replied that he was certain that among the condemned propositions of Hus there were many which were quite Christian and evangelical, and which the universal Church could not condemn. From this Eck at once drew the conclusion that he (Luther) did not even recognize the ecumenical councils. His opponent became startled and sought to retrace his steps, saying that perhaps those decrees of the Council of Constance were not genuine; for the rest, he contended, the word of God alone is infallible. Then he modified this latter statement by saying that while conciliar resolutions in matters of faith are binding, they may sometimes be erroneous. Eck pinned him to his assertion that the Council of Constance may have erred in the question of the primacy, and inexorably confronted him with all the inferences implied in that assertion. Indignant at Luther's temerity, bluff Duke George, who was loyal to the Church, exclaimed in a voice loud enough to be heard throughout the great hall: "A plague on it!"

On July 14, Purgatory, indulgences, and penance formed the subject of disputation between Eck and Karlstadt, but nothing further was accomplished except that Eck clearly defined the position of the Church, whilst Karlstadt denied the authority of the Church. At the conclusion of the disputation, on July 15 (16), it was agreed

to submit the minutes to the universities of Erfurt and Paris, which, however, also proved ineffective.

Luther was uneasy at the result of the controversy. After he had returned home, he wrote to Spalatin that the Leipsic disputation had commenced badly and ended badly, and that Eck and the men of Leipsic were to blame, because they did not seek the truth, but their own glory. He indemnified himself before the public by publishing, towards the end of August, elucidations on the theses which had been discussed at Leipsic. In these he proclaimed, even more decisively than before his adhesion to his own assertions, and distorted the position of his opponents.

Eck, on the other hand, triumphed, especially for the reason that he had succeeded in exposing Luther as a heretic who wished to destroy the authority of the councils and of the Church. He gained the support of other Catholic writers, who espoused his cause and that of the papacy which had been disparaged. Among those who supported him was the priest Jerome Emser, formerly private secretary to Duke George, a learned humanist and theologian, who attacked Luther in a number of polemical writings, which elicited violent replies.

The number of Luther's friends and followers also increased in consequence of the growing intensity of the battle. It was of less importance that the Hussite opponents of the Council of Constance in Bohemia complimented him on his attitude at Leipsic and his subsequent writings. The Utraquists endeavored to form an alliance with him, but their efforts did not result in any intimate, lasting union. As a result of the terrible Hussite campaigns waged on German soil, the Hussite faction had too bad a name in that country to make it prudent for Luther to form an intimate alliance with them at this juncture. The sympathy of the neo-German humanists, which had been aroused by the Leipsic disputation, was of far greater importance and promise for his cause. Crotus Rubeanus, a leader of this group, wrote Luther from Italy, on October 16, 1519, reminding him of their former association and adding that he had extolled him at Rome as the father of his country, who was worthy of a golden statue because he was the first to rise up in behalf of the emancipation of God's people from false opinions; for this purpose he had been called by divine providence like another Paul when a flash of lightning had prostrated him near Erfurt and driven

him into a monastery, a cause of "mourning to us, your companions."⁴⁴

At this time he was also befriended by the Erfurt humanist and jurist, Justus Jonas, subsequently his ally, who applied himself avidly to the study of the new theology.

The most influential accession to the cause of Luther, however, was the support of Melanchthon, who accompanied him to Leipsic and whose enthusiasm for the light of Wittenberg was unbounded.

Philip Melanchthon (Schwarzerd), though but twenty-one years of age, had achieved distinction as a philologist; at the recommendation of Reuchlin he had left Tübingen in the summer of 1518 and went to the University of Wittenberg to teach Greek and to carry out his plan of issuing an edition of Aristotle in the original. His acquaintance with Luther and the latter's active influence attracted the highly gifted young layman to theology, particularly in its Lutheran form. Luther promptly detected the value which the scholarly attainments and the amiability of the "weak little man" would have for his cause. With his dominating nature he completely captivated the pliant and susceptible youth. Even later, when Melanchthon had opposed the doctrinal rigor and harsh conduct of Luther, the pensive bookworm was unable to escape the overwhelming influence of his master. In his antipathy toward Scholastics and "sophists," he at once launched upon the sea of Lutheran theology with such impetuosity that he partly outdid Luther in his theses for the theological baccalaureate which was conferred on him September 9, 1519. His later achievements in behalf of Lutheranism, however, consisted particularly in two things: first, that his erudition and formal training enabled him to cast Luther's ideas into a certain systematic and academical form, and, second, that he possessed a certain skill, prudence, and flexibility which were necessary to insure success in the public negotiations with the empire and with the opponents of the new theology, gifts which Luther himself lacked.⁴⁵

In the first years of his acquaintance with Luther, Melanchthon wrote to Spalatin: "You know how carefully we must guard this earthen vessel which contains so great a treasure. . . . The earth holds nothing more divine than him."⁴⁶ He styles Luther "our

⁴⁴ Köstlin-Kawerau, *Martin Luther*, Vol. I, p. 251.

⁴⁵ *Briefwechsel*, II, pp. 204 sqq.

⁴⁶ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, p. 269; Köstlin-Kawerau, *op. cit.*, I, 442.

Elias."⁴⁷ Luther appeared to him as one "destined by God" for his work, "driven by the spirit of God." "Leave him to the working of his own spirit and resist not the will of God."⁴⁸ Luther requited him with exuberant eulogies. He declared that "almost everything" about this youthful scholar was "superhuman." "He excels me in scholarship by his learning and the integrity of his life."⁴⁹ Some of the propositions which the theological "learning" of the philologian was capable of inspiring, are set forth in the *Loci Communes Rerum Theologicarum*, published by Melanchthon in 1521, which will be discussed in the sequel.

In connection with the polemical activity which Luther unfolded in the year of the Leipsic disputation, we must here advert to his pamphlet against Eck concerning the affair of the Franciscans of Jüterbog. The latter had courageously preached against Luther's doctrines. Eck had seconded their efforts by means of printed theses. Luther attacked the friars and Eck, their counselor, in a rude pamphlet in which he styled them "vipers and a brood of vipers," and also for the first time inveighed against confession, which, he alleged, was not a divine institution,⁵⁰ but introduced by a pope.

Jerome Dungersheim, professor of theology at Leipsic, who by means of irenic and learned letters endeavored to persuade Luther to abandon his course, received from him a private reply in which he said: "We desire to have the Scriptures as our judge, whereas you desire to judge the Scriptures." He warned him not to abuse his patience, since "countless wolves were tugging" at him already.⁵¹ He also reproved the Roman chamberlain Miltitz, when the latter again appeared with conciliatory suggestions and endeavored to induce him to go with him to Treves to let the Elector, Richard von Greiffenklau, arbitrate the controversy. It was all the easier for him to reject this proposal, since Miltitz had no papal approbation for his plan, and since, moreover, the Elector of Saxony objected to the journey to Treves on account of the dangers that beset it. For the benefit of his high protector, Luther, in a letter written in December to Spalatin, said: "I should wish to fall into their hands, so that

⁴⁷ Grisar, *op. cit.*, III, p. 322.

⁴⁸ Grisar, *op. cit.*, III, 263; cfr. 322.

⁴⁹ "Eruditione et integritate vitae." *Op. cit.*, III, 321.

⁵⁰ Köstlin-Kawerau, *Martin Luther*, Vol. I, pp. 254, 257.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, I, p. 258.

they could appease their fury, did I not fear for the Word and the as yet small army of God." ⁵²

The Elector Frederick was very susceptible to the pious suggestions of Luther, whom, however, for prudential reasons, he did not wish to see. At his instigation, he diligently read the Bible. As the prince was ill since the end of August, Luther composed a comprehensive and consolatory treatise for him. It was written during the stress of his polemical writings, many of which he prepared simultaneously for the press. The work, an irenical and sententious treatise for all sufferers in general, appeared in Latin and in German at the beginning of 1520, and bore the title: "Tessaradekas" (the number fourteen). Its fourteen motives for patience were intended to replace the invocation of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. In this work the productivity of his pen is evidenced in a marvellous manner; notwithstanding the constant agitation in which he was steeped, this work shows that he was endowed with ability to write in a tone of sincere piety.

In addition to his polemical writings Luther composed many religious works of a practical nature. His polemical productions however, outnumbered the others. He denounced the distinguished Dominican theologian Hoogstraten, of Cologne, who had appealed against him to the pope, as "an illogical ass and a bloodthirsty enemy of the truth." In editing his lectures on the Epistle to the Galatians, he sharpened his statements about the new Gospel by the use of pointed denunciations, which stand side by side with reflexions savoring of mysticism. He concluded this commentary with a violent tirade, in the style of the Old Testament prophets, concerning the decadence of the Church in his day. In the interval between his bitter invectives against Emser at Dresden and other similar publications of a smaller scope, appeared the printed beginnings of his larger interpretation of the psalms (*Operationes in Psalmos*) and his Latin postil for Advent. Incidentally he composed tracts on the Our Father, the Passion of Christ, preparation for death, usury, and other topics. Prior to Luther no one had ever availed himself as extensively as he did of the infant art of printing in the interests of a cause. Scarcely anyone in succeeding ages attained to such an incessant activity in the use of the press as Luther.

In addition there were many publications by others, either in

⁵² *Briefwechsel*, II, p. 275.

his defense or in opposition to him. Many of his sermons were copied and printed either with or without his knowledge. Thus, two sermons which had been carefully copied appeared simultaneously in print, —one "On the Twofold Righteousness," the other, a companion piece, "On the State of Matrimony," in a form which aroused lively objections on account of the unheard-of frankness with which that subject was treated. It is not possible to ascertain the extent to which the printed text departed from Luther's sermon. In consequence of complaints that were made against it, he issued a revised edition of it, in the introduction to which he says that there is "a great difference between giving expression to something *viva voce* and in dead letters." In a letter to Lang at Erfurt he declined responsibility for the first edition of his homily on matrimony, saying that it was produced without his knowledge and caused him to feel disgraced. In the revised edition he deals arbitrarily with the doctrine and practice of the Church and expresses doubts about the validity of clandestine marriages, which at that time were universally regarded as valid. The sermon in its revised edition was extensively circulated.

In the beginning of October, 1519, Luther reported to Staupitz that he was satisfied with his success. Due to representations made to Staupitz because of his favoring of Luther, he assumed a more reserved attitude towards him. Archbishop Lang of Salzburg sought to attract Staupitz to his episcopal city. In the above quoted letter Luther complains: "You turn your back to me too much. As your favorite child I am keenly hurt at this. I pray you, praise God also in me, the sinner. I detest this very wicked life, I have a great fear of death, I am devoid of faith, though richly endowed with other gifts. However, I desire to serve Christ alone with my talents; He knows it."⁵³

Eck was a man of quite different character. Luther and Karlstadt having sent their versions of the Leipsic disputation to the Elector Frederick of Saxony, the latter forwarded them to Eck, who in a lengthy publication frankly and honestly corrected the reports of his opponents, showing "how they economized the truth in diverse ways."

Eck had to suffer much on account of the courageous stand he had taken. Among those who inclined to Luther's side Oecolampadius,

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 184; October 3, 1519.

who subsequently became famous, wrote a sharp satire against him. More bitter still was the contumely heaped on him in an anonymous lampoon which bore the title: "The Planed Eck" (*Eccius dedolatus*), supposed to have been written by Willibald Pirkheimer. As late as 1540, Eck, who had been persecuted throughout his life, wrote that his traducers had depicted him in many forms, among others as a man who had been "planed" and roasted.⁵⁴ It was not as though Eck had not in his private life furnished occasions for reproach; but in his defense of the Church he permitted nothing to daunt him. Soon after the disputation at Leipsic he ascended the pulpit of the magnificent Gothic Church of Our Lady in Munich, the residential city of the dukes of Bavaria, and raised his powerful voice against the Wittenberg doctrines—the first to point out to Bavaria the ways of defending the faith to which it subsequently adhered. He gradually completed his work on the primacy of the pope, which had not yet appeared in print at that time. The primacy of the pope and the Roman Church in his opinion occupied the forefront in the controversy—so much so that he desired nothing more ardently than a final decision by the Apostolic See. He rejoiced very much, therefore, when a brief of Leo X summoned him to Rome to report on conditions in Germany. In the midst of winter, on January 18, 1520, he proceeded by way of Salzburg to the Eternal City, bringing with him Luther's German works, translated into Latin. On April 1 he presented to the Pope the manuscript of his own work on the primacy.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Th. Wiedemann, *Johann Eck*, p. 141.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

CHAPTER VI

SIGNS OF THE COMING TEMPEST IN STATE AND CHURCH

LUTHER'S OPINIONS OF THE AGE

I. CURRENTS OF THE NEW AGE

Powerful movements which, proclaiming an intellectual revolution and connected more or less intimately with the revival of the study of classical antiquity, pervaded the Western world since the fifteenth century, and presaged a new period in the history of mankind. This agitation was bound to react on young Luther.

The newly invented art of printing had at one stroke created a world-wide community of intellectual accomplishments and literary ideas, such as the Middle Ages had never dreamt of. By the exchange of the most diverse and far-reaching discoveries the nations came into closer proximity with one another. The spirit of secular enterprise awakened as from a long sleep at the astounding discovery of new countries overseas with unsuspected treasures.

As a result of the increased facility of intellectual intercourse and of the development of scientific methods, criticism began to function with an efficiency greater than ever before in all departments of knowledge. Yielding to an ancient urge, the larger commonwealths made themselves increasingly independent of their former tutelage by the Church. They strove after liberty and the removal of that clerical influence whence they had largely derived their durability and internal prosperity in the past. And in proportion as they struggled for autonomy, the opulent cities, the knightly demesnes and principalities, particularly in Germany, tried to throw off the fetters which hitherto had oppressed them, and to increase their power. In brief, we find everywhere a violent break with former restrictions, a determined advance of subjectivism at the expense of solidarity and the traditional order of the Middle Ages, but especially at the expense of the supremacy of the spiritual power of the Church,