

CHAPTER XIV

LUTHER ON THE SIDE OF THE SCHMALKALDIC LEAGUE —HIS TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

I. LUTHER'S CHANGE OF OPINION RELATIVE TO ARMED RESISTANCE

After the diet of Augsburg, a striking change took place in Luther's attitude toward the question of armed resistance to the Emperor. The stringent measures of the "Reichskammergericht" announced in the "Abschied" of the diet against the secularization of Catholic church property and the rigorous steps which were generally adopted against the new religion, produced a definite attitude on the part of Protestants. The jurists of Electoral Saxony expressed themselves to Chancellor Brück increasingly in favor of preparedness and forceful resistance to the imperial mandates. Philip of Hesse, who had formed ambitious projects against the Emperor, was prepared to open hostilities at the first favorable opportunity and counted on the support of all those who shared his ideas.

Luther personally would have preferred a policy of watchful waiting without the use of violence. He held that the execution of the resolutions adopted at Augsburg should be demonstrated as impossible by permitting the innovations to progress in a peaceful way. He would have been pleased if things had been left as they were and time thus gained for the further propagation of the new gospel. However, circumstances forced him to change his attitude—a change which led to self-contradiction and open sanction of that armed resistance which he had previously condemned.

His former teaching had been that it was not permissible to meet violence with violence, especially against the Emperor; that, according to the gospel, unjust persecution was to be suffered with Christian resignation and in the expectation of final assistance from above. Despite his blustering, various reasons determined him to issue such declarations repeatedly. In the first place, he was influenced by the after-effects of the mystical idealism which he had developed in the monastery, and according to which the kingdom of God knew only a yielding disposition, humility, and submission; every true Christian must allow himself to be "oppressed and disgraced," but the de-

fense of rights was the business of the secular authorities. In addition, he had firmly persuaded himself that God would and must prosper his cause. Luther was convinced that he was right and, consequently, enjoyed the protection of Heaven, while, on the other hand he "knew" that "the Emperor is not and cannot be sure of his cause."¹ Secondly, he was influenced by the consideration that, if military force were to be invoked in support of his gospel, the prospects of success on the part of the princes who favored him were unfavorable and that the frightful misfortune of war had better be averted for humanitarian reasons. "May God preserve us from such a horror!"² He exclaims, since, as he puts it, a breach and disturbance of the public peace would be "a stain on our doctrine."³ His religious innovations would more readily recommend themselves to the princes if they made their way as peaceably as possible, without any disturbance and conflict.

Hence his assertion, repeated particularly during the first years after his apostasy, that the Word alone must accomplish all things, and his appeal to "the breath of Christ," which, according to the Bible, is to destroy Antichrist. Even as late as 1530, Elector John of Saxony was in complete accord with Luther's idea that armed resistance to the Emperor was unlawful.⁴

Nevertheless, it is well known that, from the beginning, Luther allowed himself again and again to clamor for war. It was a demand born of his agitated temperament and his ardent zeal for his gospel. Thus, in 1522, he declared that "every power must yield to the Gospel."⁵ "Not only the spiritual, but also the secular power, must yield to the Gospel whether cheerfully or otherwise." "Not a hair's breadth will I yield to the opponents"; and: "If war will ensue, let there be war" (1530). "If Germany will perish, if it will go to rack and ruin, how can I help it? I cannot save it." In 1523 he had already conceded to the Elector Frederick the right to bear arms in defense of the new doctrine, provided he did this "at the call of a singular spirit and faith," not as a Christian prince engaged in his own affairs, but as a stranger who comes to the rescue. In an opinion which he rendered for the successor of Frederick, in 1529, he said: "There must be

¹ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, pp. 47 sq.

² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴ Köstlin-Kawerau, *M. Luther*, Vol. II, p. 249.

⁵ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, p. 76.

no resistance unless actual violence is done or dire necessity compels.”⁶

These utterances laid the foundation for the change of mind which came over him in 1531.

He was still wavering when, just prior to the assembly of the diet of Augsburg, he explained to his Elector in a rather lengthy memorandum that military resistance “can in no wise be reconciled with Scripture.” “In the confusion and tumult which would ensue,” he says, “everyone would want to be emperor, and what horrible bloodshed and misery would that not cause!” “A Christian ought to be ready to suffer violence and injustice, more particularly from his own ruler.” It were preferable to sacrifice life and limb, *i.e.*, endure martyrdom.⁷ It seems that he was at that time very much frightened at the thought of the “disgrace” which would attach to his doctrine if it stirred up a religious war. This memorandum was formulated after Luther had conferred with his three advisers, Jonas, Bugenhagen, and Melanchthon. It was, however, kept secret, perhaps in order to avoid any friction with the electoral jurists, who were rather inclined to war. An abstract was sent only to Spengler at Nuremberg, which city was likewise disposed to disapprove of resistance.

This memorandum caused the adherents of the new religion great embarrassment later on, after Luther had changed his mind and the Protestant Estates, appealing to his authority had entered the Schmalkaldic War. Cochlaeus obtained its text, and published it with glosses directed against its vacillating author. The courageous abbot, Paul Bachmann of Altenzelle, appended a reply to Luther, in which he says that Luther had ever raved against the Emperor and the Pope, as though they were worse than the Turks; but in this memorandum, “being apprehensive of resistance, the old serpent turns round and faces its tail, simulating a false humility, patience, and reverence for the authorities, and says: A Christian must be ready to endure violence from his ruler.”⁸ Driven into a corner, Luther’s advisers, who had approved the memorandum, shortly after his demise tried to impugn its authenticity. Melanchthon did so incidentally, Bugenhagen of set purpose, for which he was justly reproved in public by Ratzeberger, a well-informed friend of Luther.⁹

⁶ The cited passages *ibid.*, pp. 45–50.

⁷ Erl. ed., Vol. LIV, pp. 138 sq. (*Briefwechsel*, VII, p. 239); Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III,

p. 52.

⁸ Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 63.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

The rapidity with which Luther changed his mind after formulating the above-mentioned memorandum was chiefly owing to the decision of the diet of Augsburg which was so unfavorable to him. His inclination to offer resistance manifests itself at once in his "Warning" to his dear Germans, which he composed shortly after the close of the diet and which has been discussed above, as well as in the tract which he penned against "the assassin of Dresden."

At the end of October, 1530, he was obliged to repair to Torgau with Melanchthon and Jonas for a conference concerning the question of resistance. There he met the legal advisers of his territorial lord and, perhaps, those of other princes. He was unable to resist their influence. At first he refused to declare himself, claiming that the question did not concern him, since it was his sole duty as a theologian to teach Christ. The laws of the Empire ought to be obeyed; what these were, he neither knew nor cared to know. But the jurists insisted that he express an opinion on a lengthy document which they had drawn up in justification of war. After enumerating alleged juridical and theological reasons, this document asserted that the "proceedings and acts" of the Emperor "were in contravention of law"; that, so far as the decision of this matter is concerned, he was "but a private individual." Luther did not contradict them, but placed the responsibility upon the jurists, leaving them to proceed as they pleased. Conjointly with Melanchthon and Jonas he declared that, up to now, he and the theologians, precisely as theologians, had taught that it was "not right to offer outright resistance to the authorities," but they did not know that, as the jurists pointed out, the authorities themselves conferred the right of armed resistance in cases such as that under consideration. Hence, they could "not quote the Bible against such resistance, when necessary for defense, even if it were against the Emperor in person." Taking these things into consideration, all three declared that the warlike preparations were justified.¹⁰

In writing about this affair to Link, Luther said: "In no wise have we counseled the use of force. But if the Emperor by virtue of his laws concedes the right of resistance in such a case, then let him bear the consequences." In that event, he says, the princes, *qua* princes, and in this capacity only, may offer resistance. "To

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

a Christian, nothing [of that sort] is lawful, for he is dead to the world." ¹¹

These vexatious and threadbare explanations did not, however, satisfy Link and his followers at Nuremberg, who continued to side with Spengler in his stand against resistance. Neither would the people of the margravate of Brandenburg listen to this over-refined casuistry, but persisted in their refusal to offer resistance. Luther relied all the more on his pretext, that this question should be decided by the politicians and jurists; that he, as a theologian, was obliged to refrain from offering advice; and said he abstained from offering counsel for reasons of a more lofty piety; and that he would have the entire matter rest not on "the power of man," but on that of God; for, then only "it would turn out well, even if it be a downright error and sin." ¹² Despite these extenuating phrases, the jurists, as was to be expected, made use of his declaration given at Torgau as a simple and complete acquiescence in their endeavor to bring about the formation of the military League of Schmalkalden. Spengler, who had a copy of Luther's opinion of March, 1530, in which he strictly declined to approve of resistance, wrote from Nuremberg that he was amazed "that Doctor Martin should so contradict himself." ¹³ Besides the pressure of the jurists, the following circumstances may have contributed to change Luther's attitude: First, the prospect of successful resistance as a result of the increased opposition to Rome, especially in consequence of the defection of England initiated at that time, and the prospective Protestantization of Württemberg; secondly, the Emperor's preoccupation with the hostile king of France; and, finally, the weakness and indecision of some of the Catholic estates which manifested itself at the diet of Augsburg.

As a matter of fact, Luther waxed ever more positive in his demand for armed resistance after 1531.

"We may not deviate a hair's breadth on the plea of disturbing the public peace," he wrote. "We must trust in God, who has thus far protected His Church during the most terrible wars." ¹⁴ In 1536,

¹¹ *Briefwechsel*, VIII, p. 344; January 15, 1531; Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, p. 60.

¹² Letter to a citizen of Nuremberg, March 18, 1531; Erl. ed., Vol. LIV, p. 221 (*Briefwechsel*, VIII, p. 378); Grisar, *op. cit.*, III, p. 62.

¹³ See Enders in *Briefwechsel*, VIII, p. 298; Grisar, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁴ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, pp. 78 sq.

subscribing to a document which emphasized the duty to offer armed resistance for the protection of the Gospel, he said: "I, Martin Luther, will do my best by prayer and, if needs be, with the fist."¹⁵ In his excitability and tempestuous nature he even demanded the infliction of the death penalty upon the pope and his rabble, *i. e.*, his defenders. In 1540, he gave notice that there was no other choice "but to take up arms in common against all the monks and shavelings; I too shall join in, for it is right to slay the miscreants like mad dogs."¹⁶ In this same year he also said: "We shall not prevail against the Turks unless we slay them in time, together with the priests, and even hurl them to death."¹⁷ Neither in this nor in similar passages is there any question of defense against force, but rather advocacy of bloody aggression. Yet, even if these ravings are outburst of impetuous anger, and not the expressions of calm deliberation, they indicate a deplorable state of mind and served upon occasion to justify the bloody crimes which resulted from the conflict between the advancing party of religious reform and the defenders of the old order.

2. THE SCHMALKALDIC LEAGUE AFTER 1531

The military League of Schmalkalden was initiated as early as February 27, 1531, by John of Saxony and Duke Ernest of Braunschweig at the instigation of the jurists. It was completed at Schmalkalden on March 29, when the remaining members affixed their seal to the document. Besides the rulers of electoral Saxony and Braunschweig-Lüneburg, there were affiliated with it Landgrave Philip of Hesse, Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt, Counts Gebhard and Albrecht of Mansfeld, and the cities of Strasburg, Ulm, Constance, Reutlingen, Memmingen, Lindau, Biberach, Isny, Lübeck, Magdeburg, and Bremen. Others joined the league later. The members bound themselves by an oath to come to the relief of any member attacked on account of the Gospel or on any other pretext.¹⁸

Thus a wedge was driven into the unity of the German nation at

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 247.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 69. Cf. Grisar and Heege, *Luthers Kampfbilder*, n. 4 (*Lutherstudien*), pp. 138 sq., where more pertinent passages as well as Luther's cartoon: "The Pope and the Cardinals on the Gallows," may be found (p. 32); cf. also *ibid.*, n. 31.

¹⁸ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, p. 64.

the expense of its internal strength and external development.

The Protestants were now a united political power. What Landgrave Philip and Elector John had commenced when they formed their military alliance at Gotha, in 1526, was now completed. The defense of the interests of the religious innovation passed from Luther and his theologians to the secular authorities; and the latter knew well how to pursue their selfish interests with advantage.

Luther may have been glad to remain somewhat in the background when the League was formed. The jurists and rulers were promoting his cause. If the League should prove disastrous for Germany—which actually happened—his gospel would be less exposed to criticism. Nevertheless, he had to reckon with the decline of his popularity due to the existence of the League. In no small measure he forfeited the direction of his work because of the action of the political rulers.

Schmalkalden was a small city in Hesse, situated south of Eisenach in the administrative area of Prussia. Inclosed in a pleasant valley, where the Stille flows into the Schmalkalde (a tributary of the Werra), the town presents a peaceful scene, in strong contrast with the recollections of the religious struggles in which it played a rôle. Verdant hills surround the city, the Rötberg and the Giefelsberg to the north, the Wolfsberg and the Grasberg to the south. To the east rises a hill, on which was enthroned the ancient castle of Walrab, which is now reconstructed into the stately Wilhelmsschloss. The city was encircled by a wall which has almost completely disappeared. Within its bosom the parochial church of St. George raised aloft its two spires; they are of a late Gothic design, and are still well preserved. The venerable church testifies to the pious and vigorous Catholic life that prevailed before the Protestant Reformation. The sessions of the Schmalkaldic League were held in the old-fashioned town-hall, which is still partially preserved. Luther resided in a Patrician house at the foot of the castle-hill, which still exists. Here he participated in the convention of the estates and theologians in 1537. The residence of Melanchthon, known as "Rosenapotheke," impresses the eye of present-day visitors with its antique style of architecture.

A Zwinglian element had entered this city, dominated by Lutheranism at the time the widowed sister of Philip of Hesse, Elizabeth von Sachsen-Rochlitz, took up her abode in it. Her name is associated with the change of the city to the religion of the so-called Swiss

reformers. In the parish church, which was at one time richly decorated with statues, the empty pedestals bear mute evidence to the work of destruction wrought by the Zwinglian vandals. After these iconoclasts had vented their fury on the altars, statues, reliquaries and other works of sacred art, a train of wagons bearing religious objects wended its way up the hill behind the Wilhelmsschloss, where the fanatical mob consigned them to the flames.

3. THE RELIGIOUS PEACE OF NUREMBERG (1532) AND SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

While the Protestant party in Germany prudently set about to circumvent the consequences of the diet of Augsburg by procuring a temporary religious peace through intimidation, an open religious war broke out in Switzerland, in consequence of the conditions obtaining in that country. By the harsh methods under which the new religion made its appearance under Zwingli's leadership in Zurich, that city had gotten into a war with the five Catholic cantons of the Swiss Confederacy.

In the battle of Kappel, which was won by the Catholics on the eleventh of October, 1531, Zwingli was wounded and killed. This accident removed an inexorable enemy of Luther, and bettered the prospects of a more intimate union of the German Zwinglians with Lutheranism. Luther candidly expressed his satisfaction with the judgment which God had visited upon Zwingli for denying the Eucharist, just as He had once singled out Münzer for punishment. "I have been a prophet when I said that God would not tolerate the violent blasphemies of which his party was full." Thus he wrote to Link in Nuremberg.¹⁹ Without displaying the least compassion, he consigned Zwingli to hell. Not long after Zwingli's death, on November 24, Oecolampadius died at Basle, deeply humiliated. Both men, said Luther, were to be proclaimed "damned," even though this led to "violence being offered them," because this was the best way to make people shrink from their false doctrines.²⁰ H. Barge, a Protestant author, justly says in his life of Karlstadt that Luther "particularly availed himself in his systematic, most experienced and malicious manner, of the forceful language he had at his command, in order

¹⁹ On January 3, 1532; *Briefwechsel*, IX, p. 139.

²⁰ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, p. 87. *Tischreden*, Weim. ed., Vol. I, No. 1045; II, No. 2845.

to decry Zwingli as a heretic after the latter's death.”²¹ In a letter to Henry Bullinger, who inherited the leadership of the Zurich faction from Zwingli, and with whom he desired to be at peace, Luther declared that he had learned to esteem Zwingli as a very good man after he had made his acquaintance at Marburg, and that he mourned his death.²²

On December 25, 1530, the Protestants at Schmalkalden protested against the election of Ferdinand as king of the Germans, which was desired by Charles V. This protest was a hostile act against the Hapsburgs. In spite of it, Ferdinand was elected at Cologne on January 5, 1531.

When the Schmalkaldians pleaded with the Emperor for the abolition of the proceedings before the “Kammergericht,” they received an evasive reply, but one effect of their alliance was that the term of April 15, which the recess of the diet of Augsburg had fixed against them, was nullified. The Emperor was prevented from interfering. Even the Catholic dukes of Bavaria, instigated by their ancient hostility to the Hapsburgs, entered upon a formal alliance with the Schmalkaldians against Ferdinand at Saalfeld. Alliances with France, England, Denmark and Zapolya of Hungary were sought partly by Bavaria and partly by Philip of Hesse, and were all directed against the Emperor. The invasion of Hungary by the Turks, however, and the menace of the latter to Germany, constituted the greatest obstacle to the Emperor's plans. It was political and not dogmatic reasons that compelled Charles V to yield to the schismatics.

There were prospects of a preliminary peace. The Protestants, however, demanded that the peace should include all who in future would declare their adherence to the Augsburg Confession. Even Luther, writing to the Elector John, characterized this demand as unacceptable to the Catholic party, because it would inflict too great an injury upon them. He recommends that the opposition to Ferdinand be abandoned for the sake of avoiding war. “Who would wish to be guilty of so much bloodshed for the sake of such a cause?”²³ Finally, a treaty of peace, or, more correctly, an armistice, was signed at Nuremberg on July 23, 1532. According to its terms,

²¹ Grisar, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 90.

²² May 14, 1538; *Briefwechsel*, XI, pp. 368 sq.

²³ Prior to May 16, 1532; Erl. ed., Vol. LIV, p. 301 (*Briefwechsel*, IX, p. 186).

nothing was to be done contrary to the existing religious status until the assembling of a general council. The Protestants were even assured in a secret agreement that the legal proceedings concerning the confiscation of church property would be terminated. The terms of this peace, however, were to apply only to present, not to future, adherents of the Augsburg Confession.

In the same year, 1532, Charles V proceeded to Italy, where, in February, 1533, he concluded an agreement with the Pope. Thence he repaired to Spain. It was to the great disadvantage of the Catholic cause in Germany that he did not return to the latter country until nine years later.

The state of public affairs was not essentially changed by the demise of two individuals. John, Elector of Saxony, who died in August, 1532, was succeeded in the government of his country by his son, John Frederick, who was as devoted to the cause of Lutheranism as his father had been. Pope Clement VII passed away in September, 1534, and was succeeded by Cardinal Alexander Farnese, who assumed the name of Paul III. The spirit of Catholic reform animated the latter more intensely than it had Pope Clement, and he elevated determined men to the cardinalate, such as Contarini, Pole, Sadoletto, and Caraffa. His nepotistic inclinations, however, induced him to raise two relatives to the dignity of the cardinalate, of whom one was only fourteen and the other sixteen years of age. At the very beginning of his pontificate, Paul III expressed himself in favor of convoking an ecumenical council; but political complications prevented the execution of this plan for a long time. Shortly he sent Pietro Paolo Vergerio as nuncio to Germany, in order to influence the Protestants in favor of a council. The Elector John Frederick refused to make a definite reply. It was decided to assemble the council in Mantua, in May, 1537; but the prospects of a propitious meeting were meagre because of the attitude of France and the threat of a Turkish invasion. The Protestants everywhere urged excuses for their non-participation in the council, notwithstanding that they had always clamored for one. Consequently in his circuit of the country Vergerio experienced very little coöperation, but was constrained to combat the idea of holding a German national synod instead of an ecumenical council.

On the day after Vergerio had entered Wittenberg, November 6, 1535, he invited Luther and Bugenhagen to breakfast with him in

the Elector's castle.²⁴ He assuredly would not have invited Luther, had he been better acquainted with him, or had he examined his recently published work, "Certain Aphorisms against the Council of Constance," in which Luther indulged in the most disgraceful language about the Romish Church, "the mad, blood-thirsty, red harlot," and "the dragon's heads which peep out from the posterior of the pope-ass." The author of this offensive pamphlet availed himself of the opportunity extended by the incautious papal legate, during whose visit he delivered himself of insults to the Pope and the Catholics, and boasted of his security in the possession of his new doctrine.

In discussing the proposed council, Luther said to the papal legate: "I am willing to lose my head, if I do not defend my teachings against the world. This anger of my mouth is not my anger, but God's anger." He averred that, though he and his followers were in no need of a council, he would nevertheless attend it, in order to give testimony to the truth. He adverted to "foolish and childish matters," of which ecumenical councils treat in lieu of matters of faith. He spoke of his "priests," whom "Bishop" Bugenhagen, who was present at this interview, was ordaining according to the command of the Apostle Paul, and of a dozen other hateful things, among them that "reverend nun," his wife, who had borne him five children, of whom the eldest, Hans, was going to be a great preacher of the gospel. He evidently wished to irritate the nuncio and to confront Rome with an air of superiority.

Vergerio strangely attached great importance to Luther's readiness to attend the council, and reported it with satisfaction to Rome. In this report he also described the exterior appearance of Luther. He found him possessed of a powerful frame, with exceptionally large features. Although he was past fifty, Luther appeared to be but forty. His deportment displayed "arrogance, malevolence, and lack of consideration"; he was "a man devoid of depth, without judgment, a simpleton." He wore a heavy golden chain around his neck and several rings on his fingers. He was dressed in a doublet of dark camelot, the sleeves of which were trimmed with satin, over which he wore a coat of serge lined with fox-fur. Luther himself informs us that he had himself carefully shaved before the visit of the nuncio; it being necessary, he says, to appear youthful to the legate, so that the latter might report to his master that Luther was yet able to accomplish many things. In order to create an impression, the ex-monk solemnly rode to the castle in a coach,—"the German pope," as he said to Bugenhagen, while they were riding, "and Cardinal Pomeranus, instruments of God." Vergerio closely observed him

²⁴ For the following, see Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, pp. 424 sqq.

during the interview, especially his eyes, and writes in his report that, the longer he watched his uncanny eyes, the more he was reminded of certain persons who were regarded as possessed by the devil. He also claims to have heard from former intimate friends of Luther certain discreditable facts about the latter's youth, but refrains from mentioning their nature.

The nuncio was no model of a circumspect and reliable ecclesiastical *chargé d'affaires*. Upon his return to Italy he succeeded in obtaining a bishopric. Subsequently, in 1548, he seceded from the Catholic faith and embraced the new theology. After wandering about restlessly, agitating against the papacy, he died at Tübingen in 1565, unreconciled with the Church.

In the year in which Vergerio visited Germany in the discharge of his legatine duties, the Schmalkaldic allies received a communication from Henry VIII of England, who had dragged his kingdom into the schism. He wrote that he was not disinclined "to be admitted into the Christian league of electors and princes." It was a move which was all the more gratifying to the Schmalkaldic League, since that body had, on a former occasion, sought the friendship of this powerful monarch. But the subsequent negotiations proved fruitless, because there was no indication that the King could be induced to embrace the Lutheran dogmas.

Relative to the divorce of Henry VIII, which constituted the cause and occasion of the schism, Luther had previously proposed to the king a surprising, nay, offensive solution. In an opinion on the permissibility of divorcing Catherine of Aragon, the King's legitimate wife, which Luther delivered on September 3, 1531, he openly and candidly pronounced the marriage of the King to be indissoluble, but, in order to satisfy the King, pointed out that, with the permission of the Queen, he might "marry an additional queen, in conformity with the example of the ancients, who had many wives."²⁵ Owing to his narrow-minded pre-occupation with the Old Testament, Luther had gradually accustomed himself to regard bigamy as something to be permitted by way of exception also in the Christian dispensation.²⁶ But it is not known that he granted this exception in a single instance at any time prior to this embarrassing memorandum. Later on, however, he agreed to the bigamous marriage of Philip of Hesse, who in support of his own cause expressly referred to Luther's opinion in the case of Henry VIII.

²⁵ *Briefwechsel*, IX, p. 88; Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 3 sqq.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 259 sqq.

Melanchthon, on August 23, also declared in favor of the bigamous marriage of the King, saying: "The King may, with a good conscience (*tutissimum est regi*), take a second wife, while retaining the first."²⁷

Blinded by passion, Henry VIII insisted upon divorcing Catherine and, in spite of the adverse decision of Rome, which refused to countenance bigamy, married Anne Boleyn as his sole queen, cut loose from the papacy, and, by means of his well-known brutal measures, compelled the English clergy to submit in all spiritual matters to his usurped ecclesiastical sovereignty.²⁸

As a result of fresh advances made to the Wittenberg theologians through Robert Barnes, they were now induced to expect the King to embrace the new doctrine. Luther eagerly hugged the delusion. He wrote to Chancellor Brück that the King was "ready to accept the gospel"; that it was necessary to avail themselves of this opportunity of forming an alliance with him, since such a move would "throw the papists into confusion." Melanchthon received 500 gold pieces from Henry VIII for a work which he dedicated to him. "We have at least received fifty," Catherine von Bora said at that time with a tinge of envy.²⁹ The execution in the year 1535 of those noble and pious scholars, Thomas More and John Fisher, ordered by the ruthless tyrant who could not break their opposition, was sanctioned by the Wittenberg theologians. Melanchthon asserted that the use of violence against godless fanatics was a divine command.³⁰ Luther wrote to Melanchthon in the beginning of December, 1535: "One is apt to fly into a passion, when one realizes what traitors, thieves, murderers, yea, veritable devils the cardinals, popes, and their legates are. Would they had several kings of England to execute them."³¹

About this time, envoys of Henry VIII arrived at Wittenberg and were gratified to learn that the theologians of that town, including Luther, had abandoned their view of the validity of the former marriage of the King, which they now regarded as contrary to the natural law. In the first months of 1536, articles were drawn up, designed to effect an agreement with England in matters of faith, which had been desired by the Protestants. In the judgment of

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 5.

²⁸ On the attitude of Pope Clement VII, see Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 6 sq.

²⁹ *Tischreden*, Weim. ed., Vol. II, n. 4957.

³⁰ *Corp. Ref.*, II, p. 928.

³¹ *Briefwechsel*, Vol. X, p. 275: "Utinam haberent plures reges Angliae, qui eos occiderent."

their Protestant discoverer, these articles reveal "a surprisingly great accommodation" even in most important questions, such as that of good works.³² Luther describes them as "the extreme limit of what could be granted." Nevertheless, they were not accepted by the English King. The prospects of an alliance with the Schmalkaldians began to vanish. An additional reason was because the demands of Henry VIII to have a commanding influence in the affairs of the League appeared excessive to the others. The ambitious and agitated members of the League, as well as Luther himself, believed that the King intended to usurp the place of the Elector of Saxony in the leadership of the anti-papal party in Germany.

Henceforth, the Wittenberg theologians were very indignant at Henry.

Luther, in 1540, referred to him as a worthless wretch (*nebulo*).³³ To Luther's sorrow, his friend Robert Barnes was afterwards burnt at the stake because he defended the Protestant doctrine on justification. Barnes incurred the displeasure of the English tyrant also for the reason that he and Thomas Cromwell had procured a fourth wife for him in the person of Anne of Cleve; for the author of the English schism, who had divorced successively Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour, also became tired of Anne. In the year in which Barnes was executed, Melanchthon wrote a letter to Vitus Dietrich, in which he said, respecting Henry VIII: "How very true it is that there is no sacrifice more acceptable to God than the killing of a tyrant. Would that God might inspire some courageous man with this idea!"³⁴

But though the hopes of the Protestants regarding England were shattered, their position was strengthened when Philip of Hesse conquered Württemberg. Philip wrested this country from Ferdinand of Austria in 1534, by force of arms, in order to reinstate Duke Ulrich, a follower of the Reformation, who had legitimately forfeited the crown in 1519. Previous to Philip's adventure, Luther, according to his own oral report, had declared that the breach of the public peace and the spoliation of Ferdinand were "contrary to the Gospel"

³² Words of G. Mentz; cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 9 sqq.

³³ *Tischreden*, Weim. ed., Vol. IV, n. 5139.

³⁴ Corp. Ref., III, p. 1076: "*Quam vere dixit ille in tragoeadia, non gratiorem victimam Deo mactari posse quam tyrannum. Utinam alicui forti viro Deus hanc mentem inserat!*" On Luther and Cromwell, who was likewise executed, cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 11 sq.

and "a stain upon our doctrine."³⁵ After the Landgrave had subjugated that country, and, in view of the fact that the terms of the treaty with its equivocal religious article offered the best prospects for the introduction of the new religion by Duke Ulrich, Luther expressed his delight and congratulations to the Hessian court through the preacher Justus Menius. "We rejoice," he said, "that the Landgrave has returned in safety and with the coveted peace. God is manifestly with this cause. Contrary to our common expectation, He has transformed fear into peace! He who began this work will also accomplish it. Amen."³⁶ Luther also informed his friends that the Landgrave, previous to his attack upon Württemberg, had visited the King of France and obtained from him a loan of 200,000 crowns in support of the war.³⁷

To the best of his ability, Ulrich complied with the expectations of his friends and began to Protestantize his country.

In the year 1534, the Anabaptists obtained the upper hand at Münster by the well-known methods so characteristic of them. Their triumph proved that Luther was not wrong when he suspected that this furtive sect was capable of anything. Indeed, since the beginning of the twenties, he might have learned a lesson from the sharp criticism to which the Anabaptists subjected him. In many respects this criticism was justified. It was largely based on religious grounds. But the horrors which the capital of Westphalia was compelled to suffer, the alleged divine revelations, the cruelties and the polygamy of the Anabaptist sect, produced an outbreak of terrible fanaticism, of which the new religion and Luther's proclaimed Christian freedom were not guiltless. The sectaries of Münster now write—so Luther indignantly exclaims—that "there are two false prophets, the Pope and Luther, but of the two Luther is the worse."³⁸ In his preface to Urban Rhegius' work against the Anabaptists of Münster, Luther pronounced a characteristic verdict upon them: "It is perfectly evident that the devil reigns there in person, yea, one devil sits on the back of another like the toads do."³⁹

When Münster, after a siege, had fallen on June 25, and the reign of terror had been ended by the execution of the ring-leader, John

³⁵ *Tischreden*, Weim. ed., IV, n. 5038.

³⁶ July 14, 1534; *Briefwechsel*, Vol. X, p. 63.

³⁷ *Tischreden*, Weim. ed., Vol. IV, n. 5038, pp. 628 and 630.

³⁸ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, p. 419.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

of Leyden, and his associates, Catholicism found its position in the north somewhat strengthened.

To offset the growing popular sympathy in favor of the ancient Church, the Protestants endeavored to fortify themselves by a more intimate union of Lutheranism with the people of Upper Germany, who in the eyes of the Lutherans, were still too much inclined towards Zwinglianism. A complete understanding, especially on the question of the Eucharist, was all the more urgent, since the religious peace of Nuremberg was only temporary. The Landgrave of Hesse and Martin Bucer of Strasburg were active in trying to conclude a more intimate union with Lutheranism, without, however, wishing to abandon the Zwinglian denial of the Real Presence. Bucer endeavored to deceive the others by resorting to ambiguous formulas. Both he and Philip flattered themselves with the thought that they could succeed in inducing the people of Upper Germany and even those of Switzerland to join a league of the followers of the new gospel.

"A union between us and the Sacramentarians is being attempted with great expectations and longing," Luther wrote in August, 1535. He on his part was quite sincere in his intentions. On May 22 of the following year, he had the satisfaction of seeing the representatives of Strasburg, Augsburg, Memmingen, Ulm, Esslingen, Reutlingen, Frankfort and Constance assemble in Wittenberg. They were accompanied by two Lutheran leaders, Menius of Eisenach and Myconius of Gotha. Not one of the expected Swiss delegates appeared. All present adopted the so-called "Wittenberger Concordie," a product of Melanchthon's subtle pen.⁴⁰ The articles followed Luther in recognizing the practice of infant baptism and confession. The article on the Eucharist affirmed that the body and blood of Christ were "really and substantially" present in the Sacrament, so that even the "unworthy" verily receive the body and blood of Christ. But the interpretation which they placed upon the words showed that the Upper Germans still clung to the view that Christ is present only by that faith which even the "unworthy" may have and that He bestows on the communicant, not His flesh and blood, but merely His grace. Even Melanchthon secretly adopted this interpretation in opposition to Luther.

The issue now depended upon Luther. For the nonce he was contented with the closer union which the Upper Germans had

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 421 sq.

achieved by means of the so-called "Wittenberg Concord." By various friendly letters to the Swiss he tried "to calm down, smoothe, and further matters for the best."⁴¹ For the time he did not wish to mention even to Bullinger of Zurich the doctrinal points in which they differed. His attitude, otherwise so abrupt, waxed strangely latitudinarian. It was similar to his conduct at the time of his negotiations with the King of England. Undoubtedly, he thought to himself—which might excuse him—that by considerate treatment the Zwinglians as a whole would gradually come over to his side, in doctrinal matters, especially since the cities of Upper Germany were in need of assistance. In this case, the wish was father to the thought. Nevertheless, even Protestant biographers have found Luther's way of ignoring the differences inherent in the Concord to be very peculiar,⁴² especially in view of the fact that he had looked with suspicion upon Bucer's artful endeavors (*admonui enim ne simularet*).⁴³

Distrustful of the sincerity of the Swiss, he at first distrusted the so-called Helvetian Confession, drafted in the beginning of 1536 by Bullinger, the leader of the Zurich faction, with the aid of Bucer. But in May, 1538, filled with happy expectations, he wrote to Duke Albert of Prussia: "Things have been set going with the Swiss. . . . I hope God will put an end to this scandal, not for our sake, for we have not deserved it, but for His name's sake, and in order to vex the abomination at Rome; for they are greatly affrighted and apprehensive at the new tidings."⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the Swiss "scandal" continued and disillusioned him painfully. Bullinger and Leo Judae, his associate at Zurich, persevered in their sharp opposition to Luther. Their letters contain bitter denunciations of his doctrine and character.

Leo Judae continued to write in the tone which he had adopted in 1534, when in a letter to Bucer he complained about Luther's wanton distortion of the teachings of Christ; the Apostle Paul, he said, would not have tolerated such a bishop. It was not sufficient for anyone to preach merely that Christ is our salvation. Luther was guilty of disgraceful mistakes, and ignored and execrated everybody else. "Since the Apostolic age," Leo continues, "no one has discussed the most sacred things in a manner so disgraceful, ridiculous, and irreligious as Luther." And, whilst indulging in such conduct, he (Luther) set himself up for a pope. Was not a teacher to be judged

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁴² Köstlin-Kawerau, *M. Luther*, Vol. II, p. 348.

⁴³ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. III, p. 421, note 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

in the light of his writings? What would be left of Luther if he were to be judged by his fruits, according to the saying of Christ? Do his aspersions reflect moral grandeur? "I cannot imagine that his writings will meet with the approval of anyone whose mind is not entirely perverted." "I implore the Lord Jesus that he make Luther mild and modest. May He bestow His spirit and His love upon him, that he may discontinue his repugnant agitation; or—take him from our midst." ⁴⁵

Luther's subsequent provocative words against the Swiss and those who shared their beliefs, such as Schwenckfeld, resulted in deepening the rancorous sentiments of the Swiss. They were vexed, for instance, when he averred that Oecolampadius, a Zwinglian, was suddenly removed from this life by the devil. Bullinger discloses his mind to Bucer on the "cynical, scurrilous language" of Luther. He laments his insistence upon his own doctrines and the infallibility of his own German version of the Bible, "which, after all, was prepared with too little freedom from prejudice," etc.⁴⁶ Later on Bullinger indulged in even more violent diatribes in his "True Confession." In view of the declarations of such leaders among the Swiss theologians, it is unintelligible how, in the nineteenth century, the rulers of Prussia could urge the union of Lutheranism with the Calvinists (Zwinglians) under the name of the Reformed Evangelical Church.

4. LUTHER'S TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE (COMPLETED IN 1534)

Luther's perseverance in working on his German translation of the Bible enabled him to publish a complete translation in 1534. It was printed by Hans Lufft at Wittenberg, and bore the title: *Biblia*, that is, the Entire Sacred Scriptures, Done into German by Martin Luther, Wittenberg.

The New Testament had been edited by him in September, 1522, twelve years previously, after the hasty labors begun during his sojourn at the Wartburg. It was repeatedly revised in subsequent editions. Meanwhile, the several parts of the Old Testament were edited from time to time by the translator. When the entire Bible

⁴⁵ Kolde, *Analecta*, p. 229; to which should be added, for purposes of consultation, the passages in *Histor. Jahrbuch*, 1919 (*Lutheranalekten*, IV), pp. 510 sqq., which have been supplemented by me from Baum's *Collected Letters* in the Strasburg library.

⁴⁶ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 409.

finally appeared, it contained Luther's marginal notes, composed in short sentences which were intended to explain the text or to render its religious meaning intelligible to the reader. These notes expressed the peculiar views of the editor. The different books were accompanied by prefaces which embody remarkable explanatory and controversial passages. The entire book was richly illustrated with wood-cuts.

In his preface to the book of Job, Luther discusses the pains it required to make a German version of the Bible. "We all," he says, "Master Philip [Melanchthon], Aurogallus, and I, labored with such care on Job that we were sometimes barely able to get through three verses in four days." . . . The reader "does not perceive what hindrances and stumbling-blocks lay in the path he now glides along as easily as down a greasy pole. To us, however, it cost much toil and sweat to remove all the hindrances and stumbling-blocks."⁴⁷

The linguistic excellence of this German version, in contrast with former translations, which were rather clumsy because too literal, is so undisputed, even on the part of Catholic critics, that we need not print any words of appreciation of it here. The immense influence which this work exercised on the development of the German language is universally acknowledged. In his larger work on Luther, the present author has treated of these excellent features extensively, and discussed in detail the various phases of Luther's Bible and its relation to the medieval translations.⁴⁸

The linguistic advance was achieved in a twofold manner. In the first place, Luther adopted the style of the Saxon curia, a purified form of modern High German, which had developed since the middle of the fourteenth century. He did not create this language, but made the greatest contributions toward its propagation in virtue of the popularity of his literary productions, and particularly his translation of the Bible. In the second place, he infused into the language which he had inherited, his own animated spirit, and popularized it by listening to the genuinely colloquial expressions current among the common people and introducing these into the literary language. He himself tells us that he found it of the utmost service to "look into the jaw of the man in the street," *i. e.*, to observe closely the speech of the common people. In rejecting an inadequate expression, he was

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 497.

⁴⁸ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 494-546. See, however, J. M. Lenhart, O. M. Cap., "Luther's Indebtedness to the Catholic Bible" in *Fortnightly Review*, St. Louis, May, 1930, pp. 103 ff.

apt to say: "No German speaks thus," or "The German language does not tolerate that."⁴⁹

Besides these linguistic characteristics, the method he employed had two excellent features. He always takes pains to go back to the original text of Sacred Scripture, whereas former translators had invariably followed the Latin Vulgate. In this respect Luther followed the humanistic tendency of his age. Credit is due to Erasmus for having furnished the first great impulse to the study of the original text of Scripture by his edition of the Greek New Testament. The other excellence of Luther's version consists in the clearness he imparts by means of circumlocutions to such expressions as would otherwise be difficult of comprehension. Thus he tried to make the meaning clear to all. In doing so, however, he proceeded in an altogether too arbitrary manner, but he succeeded in making the Bible a readable and popular book.

His translation had a remarkable sale, to which the celebrity of the author and strong partisan interest naturally contributed no small share. The latest bibliographer of Luther's German Bible, Paul Pietsch, notes 34 Wittenberg impressions of the Weimar Edition alone, and 72 reprints for the rest of Germany during the decade between 1530 and 1540; and again, from 1541 to 1546, the year of Luther's death, 18 additional Wittenberg impressions and 26 reprints. It is believed, according to rather reliable investigations, that the press of Lotther at Wittenberg published no less than 100,000 complete Bibles from 1534 to 1584, to which must be added particularly the Bibles published by the press of Lufft.⁵⁰ One might almost say that Germany at this time was deluged with Bibles. What a powerful influence Luther's German Bible must have exercised in enlivening disputations about religion, is obvious; it is equally obvious that it served very much to fortify the existing prejudice that the ancient Church had withheld the Bible from the people and that it was now necessary to purify it by interpreting it in the light of Lutheran opinions.

To the end of his life, Luther devoted himself assiduously to the improvement of each subsequent edition of his German Bible. After 1539 special meetings of scholars were held at Wittenberg to assist him with their linguistic or theological knowledge in polishing his translation. In enumerating

⁴⁹ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 503. Cfr. Janssen-Pastor, *Geschichte des deutschen Volkes*, Vol. VII, 14th ed., 1904, p. 648. (English tr., Vol. XIV, pp. 401 sqq.)

⁵⁰ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 498.

the names of the regular or occasional members of this "sanhedrin of the best people," Mathesius⁵¹ mentions Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas, Cruciger, Matthew Aurogallus, teacher of Hebrew at the University of Wittenberg, Bernard Ziegler, a learned Hebraist of Leipsic, and Dr. Forstemius of Tübingen. Luther's experienced amanuensis, Rörer, usually kept the minutes of these meetings. The Weimar edition of Luther's works prints what is left of the minutes of the sessions of this Bible-revision committee which met from 1539 to 1541. As a consequence of its labors, the Wittenberg Bibles published by Lufft from 1540 to 1541 show a decided improvement.

The most celebrated edition of Luther's German Bible was the so-called "Normalbibel," which appeared in 1545. It was the last to appear during his life-time. A facsimile of Luther's handwriting with parts of the Old Testament, which is reproduced in the section devoted to the "German Bible" in the new Weimar edition, enables one to see with what diligence he filed and polished the text, and how he often struggled to find the best expression for the thought.

Passing from this more exterior appreciation of his work to its intrinsic value as a translation, the so-called revised Lutheran Bible, published in 1883, has shown what a large amount of textual corrections was necessary before Luther's version satisfied the requirements of modern critical scholarship. This edition not only eliminated many errors, but also altered expressions no longer intelligible at the present time. The revised editions which have appeared since 1883 were an attempt at improving Luther's work still more.⁵² Christian Josias Bunsen (d. 1860), who was the author of a Protestant "Bibelwerk," said there were "3,000 passages in Luther's Bible which call for revision."⁵³ Discussing the defects of scholarship which remained even after the revision of 1883, the learned Protestant philologist and Bible expert, E. Nestle, said: "A comparison with the English or Swiss work of revision shows how much farther we might and ought to have gone."⁵⁴ In 1885, the Protestant theologian and orientalist, Paul de Lagarde, vigorously criticized the Lutheran text as well as its first jejune official revision of 1883. He prints a long list of pas-

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 499 sq.

⁵² A severe criticism of the official edition of 1913, by which the edition of 1892 was to be improved, in the *Christliche Welt*, Marburg, 1913, p. 1010.

⁵³ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 511.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 511 sq.

sages which he holds to be manifestly mistranslations of the original, some of which are arbitrary and evidently made for theological purposes.⁵⁵

Undoubtedly these theological variations constitute a serious defect of Luther's Bible, which diminish its value as a religious work. In the interests of his new doctrine Luther took the liberty to alter the sacred text without warrant. Döllinger's numerous exposures relative to this point met with the approval of Paul de Lagarde. Janssen has once more called attention to them in his History of the German People.⁵⁶ The Protestant Paulsen in his *Geschichte des Gelehrten Unterrichts* criticizes Luther's arbitrary alterations of the Biblical text. Notwithstanding these criticisms, the mistranslations are retained in the most recent popular editions of Luther's Bible.

Thus, in the texts which treat of justification and the significance of the law, Luther retouches the wording to suit his own doctrine. The law, according to his translation, "worketh *only* wrath"; "by the law *only* cometh the knowledge of sin." In Rom. IV, 15 and III, 20 he interpolates the word "alone."

Again, Luther's reproduction of Rom. III, 28 would have it that man is justified by faith alone. In this passage, Luther arbitrarily inserted the word "alone" and tried to justify this insertion as follows: "The text and the meaning of St. Paul demand, nay, compel this amplification." This, however, is merely a requisite of his false theory, which he imputes to the Apostle in order to square it with his own doctrinal system. The word "alone" in the Pauline text is an obtrusive recommendation of Luther's principal heresy and a subjective falsification. The context makes it quite evident, however, that, objectively speaking, the real thought of St. Paul could have been expressed by the word "alone."⁵⁷

In Rom. III, 25 sq., Luther again fortifies his doctrine by adding the word "alone" and twice inserts the clause: "an offering of justice which availeth before God," which is not found in the original text. Luther falsely translates Rom. X, 4: "For the end of the law is Christ; he that believeth in him is righteous." The same is true of Rom. VIII, 3, where the Greek text is incompatible with the German rendition.

The illustrations above cited are all taken from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

The word "pious" is persistently and designedly substituted for "just."

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

⁵⁶ Döllinger, *Die Reformation*, Vol. III, pp. 140 sqq.; Janssen-Pastor, *op. cit.*, Vol. VII, 14 ed., pp. 654 sqq.

⁵⁷ For Luther's hectoring justification of the "alone" see *supra*.

Noe, Job, Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Joseph, the foster-father of Christ, are all pious, but not just, as in the original text. To be pious, according to Luther, is to have faith, and, through faith, imputed justice. He does not admit real, personal justification. In like manner, Luther everywhere uses the word "congregation" instead of "church," in conformity with the tendency of his doctrine. In reproducing Bar. VI, 30, he ridicules the "priests sitting in their temples with their voluminous copes, with shaven faces and wearing tonsures."⁵⁸

In addition there are interspersed glosses and prefaces to the several sacred books which give him a fine chance for indulging in polemics. He displays a truly marvelous dexterity in interpreting the text in favor of his new doctrine. This is particularly true of his preface to the Epistle to the Romans.⁵⁹ In his commentary on the passage which records the divine foundation of the primacy ("Thou art Peter," etc.; Matt. XVI, 18), he declares that in this passage "Peter" means "all Christians with Peter," and the creed of the congregation is the rock upon which the Church is built. The story of the anointment of Christ by Mary Magdalen elicits the following comment from him: "Thus one sees that faith alone makes the work good."⁶⁰ And so on.

After the appearance of Luther's New Testament, the Catholic ducal court of Saxony conceived the idea of publishing Luther's work without its distorted reflections on Catholic doctrine. Commissioned by Duke George, Jerome Emser undertook this task, in 1527. The conditions then prevalent in the publishing trade sanctioned such a measure. Emser did not claim that the publication was a new translation. Luther's grounds of complaint, both as a matter of fact and in law, were unfounded, although the procedure is contrary to our modern ideas. Moreover, the title merely announced that the New Testament was "restored to its original sense" in this edition.⁶¹ Later on, after Emser's death, Augustine Alfeld published a reprint, which bore the inaccurate title: "The New Testament, translated into German by the late Emser." The Catholics, however, were determined to counteract Luther's great success by means of other translations. In 1534, John Dietenberger, a Mayence Dominican, published a complete translation of the Bible, in which he availed himself to a great

⁵⁸ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 514 sqq.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 526.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 518.

⁶¹ On Emser's German New Testament, cf. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 518 sqq.

extent of Luther's work. Dr. John Eck proceeded more independently in his German Bible of 1537, which, however, because of its stilted style, found but few readers.

Cochlaeus complained that Luther's work was highly regarded, even among the common people; that cobblers and old women pored over it and debated its arbitrary interpretations as if they were the word of God.⁶²

The liberties which Luther took in his appraisal of entire books of the Bible were fundamentally even more reprehensible than the defects which have been censured above. It is known that he did not feel bound by the "canon" in force since the early days of the Church, which tradition and the teaching magisterium had sanctioned, and which decided what books constituted the Bible.⁶³

In addition to the illustrations already given, the following examples may be adduced. The second book of the Machabees and the book of Esther were rejected the former because it is "too much inclined to judaize," the latter on account of its "heathen naughtiness." The Epistle to the Hebrews was set aside as "a made-up epistle consisting of fragments amongst which, there is wood, hay and chaff." The Epistle of St. Jude the Apostle is ranked "below the chief books [of the Bible]." The Apocalypse he regarded as "neither apostolic nor prophetic" and said: "Let each one judge of it as he thinks fit."

He asserts that "the Epistle of St. James," which has previously been discussed, "justifies [good] works," and compared with other books of the Bible, which (he maintains) clearly proclaim the doctrine of justification by faith alone, is "but an epistle of straw," which has "nothing evangelical about it." Of this verdict, one of the most celebrated modern Protestant Bible scholars, Theodor von Zahn, says that it is "an act of injustice as incomprehensible as it is regrettable."⁶⁴ It is quite comprehensible, however, when one takes into consideration the stupendous levity with which Luther regarded his doctrine as an infallible criterion.

In rejecting the canon of the Bible, Luther destroyed the basis on which the authority of the Sacred Book had been founded. It was tragic that no Christian writer ever inflicted so much damage upon the Book of Books as the man who boasted of having favored it in so

⁶² Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 529.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

high a degree and represented it as the great, nay, the sole source of faith.

It is psychologically interesting to follow the motives and the general ideas which guided Luther in the course of his protracted work of translating Sacred Scripture, expressed in his own words. He intends to show the "papists" that they are not competent to translate the Bible properly, because they do not possess the "mind of Christ," and hence they ought to leave it "in peace" and undisturbed.⁶⁵

"It is not an easy matter," he says, to find "others as sincerely devoted to the Bible as we are here at Wittenberg, who have been the first to receive the grace to reveal once more the Word of God, unadulterated and purified." "None of them knows how to translate correctly."⁶⁶ The new Bible, therefore, was to put the papists thoroughly to shame. Above all else, it was to show how mistaken they were when they reduced it to a "code" for the performance of good works, since it "condemns such works and demands faith in Christ."⁶⁷

Hence, Luther was preëminently swayed by a polemical purpose. He wished to see the Bible read by everybody. Rich and poor alike should be enabled to judge that his doctrine was the only true doctrine. Hausrath, a Protestant biographer of Luther, writing in complete accord with the sentiments of his hero, says: "Only now could the burghers feel that they had attained to manhood in the matter of religion, and that the universal priesthood had become a reality. The head of each household now had the wellspring of all religious truth brought to his very door. . . . For a while this might lead to strange excesses, as the theology of the New Prophets showed." Still, "the advent of the German Bible was the dawn of freedom."⁶⁸

It is easy to understand the conscious pride which filled Luther upon the completion of his work. "St. Jerome and many others have made more mistakes in translating than we." "I know that I am more learned than all the universities, those sophists by the grace of God." He invited those who censured him to "do even the twentieth part" of what he had done. "Since the Church has existed, we have never had a Bible like this one." Incidentally it is a real pleasure to him that he was able to rouse the fury (*furias concitare*) of the papists by means of such a great work.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Thus at the head of the edition of 1545.

⁶⁶ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, pp. 526 sq.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

⁶⁸ *Luther's Leben*, I, p. 136; quoted by Grisar, *ibid.*, p. 529.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

He realized withal that he had to overcome many temptations whilst occupied with this work; thus he tells us that, whilst engaged in translating the story of Jonas, he "looked into the belly of the whale, where everything seemed given over to despair."

Besides his habitual interior struggles he was oppressed with the idea that his laborious task "would not be duly appreciated even by his own followers."⁷⁰

He felt an interior satisfaction, however, when he recalled that his text counteracted the Jewish commentators, "who cannot know or understand what is said by Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."⁷¹

The refutation of Jewish errors embodied in Luther's Bible is a satisfactory feature of his work.

Julius Köstlin declares that in his translation of the Bible, Luther "bestowed on his German people the greatest possible gift" by making of the Book of Books "an heirloom of the whole German nation." The *whole* German nation? From what has been said above it can be seen that Luther's much-lauded translation was rather a piece of subjective propaganda put forth in the interests of his own party. And as regards "his German people," it was precisely while he was engaged in this work that he applied to the German nation opprobrious epithets which place "the greatest gift" in a peculiar light. Thus the reproaches of the Prophets inspired him to use the following language: "I have begun the translation of the Prophets—a work that is quite in keeping with the gratitude I have hitherto met with from this heathenish, nay, utterly bestial nation."⁷²

A word in reference to the illustrations which accompanied Luther's German Bible. The Catholics, who at that time still constituted a majority of the German nation, were aggrieved to see how their Church was ridiculed by the pictures contained in the complete Lutheran Bible of 1534, just as had been the case in the previously published New Testament. The polemical illustrations contained in the New Testament were reproduced in the complete Bible. The Babylonian harlot and the dragon once more appear crowned with the papal tiara. On the title-page of the Wittenberg edition of Luther's complete works, issued by himself in 1541, there is a picture, presumably drawn by the elder Cranach, depicting the ancient Church

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 533.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 534.

in the act of driving men into hell; whereas the new Gospel leads them to heaven.⁷³ A furious looking devil in the shape of a beast, with a cardinal's hat on its head, and death in the form of a skeleton, are depicted as driving a man, clad only in a loin-cloth, into the yawning abyss of hell, where the pope, crowned with the tiara, and two other forms are burning. The obverse side of the picture glorifies the new Church. John the Baptist leads a nude penitent to the Crucified Saviour, from whose side a stream of blood gushes over a sinner who has been saved by faith. Verily, the Catholics could not regard Luther's Bible as "the greatest gift to his German nation."

When the Catholic spokesmen took into consideration Luther's principles relative to the rank and use of the Bible, they regarded themselves as justified in assuming an attitude of severe condemnation.⁷⁴ These principles contained within themselves the seeds of religious chaos. Luther held that beside, and in addition to, the words of the Bible, the "spirit" was to be the true touchstone of orthodoxy. The spirit would teach everyone to understand the sacred text. In case of doubt, the interior "feeling," which comes from above, must assume the direction of reason. Everyone stands "for himself." To the pious, according to Luther, the Word of God is perfectly clear; but he frequently emphasizes its obscurity. He holds that, owing to the absurd interpretations of many obscure passages, the Bible must almost be styled "a heretical book." Hence, in order to avoid theological anarchy, he makes the self-contradictory demand that the interpretations of the Wittenberg school, *i.e.*, his own tribunal, should always be followed. The "external Word," upon which he insists in opposition to the spirit of arbitrariness, is equivalent to his own word. Yea, penalties are to be inflicted upon those who contemn the magisterium exercised by himself.⁷⁵

It should not be overlooked, however, that Luther's interpretation of the Bible has the undisputed merit that, in contrast with the older allegorical method of exposition, he always tries to establish the literal sense, and for this purpose lays under contribution the study of languages. Not infrequently he employs to advantage the exegetical works produced before his time, for instance, those of the celebrated

⁷³ The frontispiece of 1541 is reproduced in its original size in Grisar and Heege, *Luthers Kampfbilder*, Heft III, plate 9; cfr. the same work, pp. 19 sqq.

⁷⁴ Cf., e. g., Johann Fabri, quoted in Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. V, p. 529.

⁷⁵ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 387 sqq., 420 sqq.; Vol. VI, pp. 237 sqq., 279 sqq.

Nicholas of Lyra. A well-known saying of his opponents was: "Si Lyra non lyrasset, Lutherus non saltasset." If Lyra (the lyre) had not played, Luther would not have danced.⁷⁶ Generally speaking, however, Luther treated the Biblical lore of the past with such supreme disregard that his neglect of the older commentators redounded to the very great disadvantage of his own work. In addition to this scientific defect of Luther's Bible, the Catholic is bound above all else to take into account the fundamental detriment to exegesis resulting from Luther's abandonment of ecclesiastical tradition. Catholics believe that the Church has been constituted by God the official interpreter of Sacred Scripture. Her voice, resounding down the ages, is sufficient guaranty that her children will not go astray in their study of the Bible. Luther repudiated her guidance, to his own detriment as well as to that of his followers, even of those who were sincere in their intentions and inclined to positive religion. He saw this fact with his own eyes and bitterly rued it. He speaks with horror of the "rubbish in Scripture."

It is easy to refute Luther's assertion that he "pulled the Bible from underneath the bench," where it lay buried, owing to its complete misunderstanding under the papacy, and because it had been denied to the laity and the clergy.⁷⁷

Catholic exegetes are accused of having ignored the fact "that Christ forms the true content of Scripture." This accusation has been refuted by a mass of quotations from writers like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and also from Luther's older contemporaries, such as J. Perez of Valencia.⁷⁸ Still more striking is the assertion that the Bible was not read during the Middle Ages, nay, that its reading was prohibited by the Church.

Frederick Kropatschek, a Protestant, states in his scholarly work, *Das Schriftprinzip der lutherischen Kirche* (1904): "If everything be taken into account, it will no longer be possible to say, as the old polemics did, that the Bible was a sealed book to both theologians and laity. The more we study the Middle Ages, the more this fable tends to dissolve into thin air. . . . The Middle Ages concerned themselves with Bible translation much more than was formerly supposed."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 535.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 536 sq.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 541.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 536.

Similar admissions could be cited from other Protestant scholars such as Walther Köhler, Ch. Nestle, J. Geffcken, W. L. Krafft, E. v. Dobschütz, O. Reichert, G. W. Meyer, A. Risch, etc.⁸⁰ Above all it is now agreed that the laity were never prohibited from reading the Bible, as has often been alleged. It was only when there was danger that the Bible would be abused during menacing heretical movements, that the Church authorities from time to time adopted measures forbidding the laity to read the Bible. Historical researches show that the Bible was widely circulated both in the original languages and in translations, in manuscripts and printed editions, in the age that preceded Luther. On account of the importance of the subject, a synopsis of these researches is hereby offered.

Wilhelm Walther of Rostock and Franz Falk, a scholarly clergyman of Mayence, have devoted themselves with distinction to a study of this matter. In recent times, a German-American scholar, W. Kurrelmeyer, has edited in installments *Die erste deutsche Bibel* (The First German Bible), in the Library of the Literary Society of Tübingen; these installments are supplied with critical contributions from all German translations prior to Luther.⁸¹ The oldest complete printed German Bible appeared in 1466 and was published by Mentel of Strasburg. It was followed by thirteen other editions, some of which deviated to some extent from the first, but all appeared before the publication of Luther's Bible. The name of the editor of the Bible published by Mentel cannot be established with certainty. In consequence of the republication of this version, its text had become a kind of German Vulgate.

Dr. Falk has established the fact that no less than 156 different editions of the Latin Bible were printed in the period between 1450 and 1520.⁸² In addition, there are the many extant manuscripts, which have been classified by Walther, as well as numerous prints and manuscripts of separate parts of the Bible, such as the Psalter and the Gospels and the Epistles of the ecclesiastical year.

The latter, being lessons taken from the Old and the New Testament, had been translated and collected in so-called "plenaria" or postils, which were to be found everywhere in the hands of the faithful. In lieu of the complete Bible, which was expensive and only partially intelligible to many, these postils supplied the people with reading material which was adapted to their needs and was explained to them during divine service. In virtue of

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 545 sq.

⁸¹ See Ch. Nestle in the Protestant *Enzyklopädie für Theologie*, Ergänzungsband XXIII,

these "*plenaria*," all classes of the people were well grounded in the most essential and instructive portions of the Bible.

Relative to the partial and complete translations of the Bible, Sebastian Brant could truly say of the pre-Lutheran epoch: "Every country is now filled with Sacred Scripture."⁸³

The extant German translations of the Bible, particularly those contained in the "*plenaria*," were by no means unknown to Luther. It may also be assumed—in fact it has been specifically demonstrated in many instances—that he made use of them more or less in his translation, as any scholar would have done when engaged in a similar work. His merit of having proceeded in an independent manner remains undiminished, even if it is to be assumed that his translation was influenced to some extent by a fixed German vocabulary expressive of Biblical words and phrases.⁸⁴

A remark remains to be made on the practical use of the Bible during the later Middle Ages. It was an abuse that the Bible was excessively allegorized, and that it was not sufficiently used in scholastic disputations in comparison with philosophy; but it always retained its prestige in the pulpit and religious literature. Popular devotional literature furnishes a striking refutation of the claim that the Reformation rescued the Bible from oblivion, even if the statistics and facts which have been adduced above were unknown. The literature composed for the instruction and religious edification of the faithful is replete both with Biblical passages and the spirit of the Bible; at times, it is even excessive in its application of Holy Writ.

The legend of the chained Bible, which is occasionally encountered even at the present time, is little less than grotesque. In Protestant popular tracts young Luther's discovery of the Bible at Erfurt is associated with the queer notion that the copy which he happened upon while a student was fastened by a chain in the library. Copies of the Bible and other books intended for the common use of the public were frequently chained, to safeguard them from unjustifiable appropriation or removal from the room in which they were intended to be used. This very practical custom, still in vogue at present in the parlors of Italian convents, has given rise to the false notion that the Bible was kept chained in the Middle Ages.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 536, 540.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 460. On "Luther's Indebtedness to the Catholic Bible" see J. M. Lenhart in the *Fortnightly Review*, St. Louis, Mo., XXXVII, 5 (May, 1930), pp. 103 ff.

5. LUTHER'S LITERARY ACTIVITY

Among the writings which Luther composed during the years in which he concluded his translation of the Bible, are many sermons and scattered prefaces written for publications of his friends and adherents. Popular religious treatises gradually become less frequent. One of the more noteworthy of the latter bears the title, "A Simple Method of Prayer, for a Dear Friend, Master Peter, Barber" (1535).⁸⁶ This booklet, written at the solicitation of his barber, is an appeal to all Christians who desire to lead a devout life, recommending to them particularly meditation on the "Our Father" and the Ten Commandments. Luther relates that he himself used passages from the Pater Noster and sections of the Decalogue as fuel with which to kindle a little fire within his heart. He was unfortunate in the selection of his addressee; for Barber Peter stabbed his son-in-law in the following year. Owing to Luther's intercession, the sole punishment meted out to him was exile.

A more voluminous and important treatise is that on the morals of princes and courtiers, published in 1534, under the title, "Psalm 101, with a Commentary by M. Luther."⁸⁷ In this work Luther vigorously reminds the upper classes of their duties, bewails the decline of morality in Germany, and points to intemperance as a hereditary evil. If every nation has its own devil, he says, the German devil must be a good wine-skin. At that time it was a prevalent custom at the Electoral court to indulge in riotous drinking bouts. The new Elector, John Frederick, was not the last one who might profit from Luther's admonition. In one of his Table Talks Luther expressed himself about his protector thus: "He is possessed of every virtue; but just fancy him swilling like that!"⁸⁸ Duke Henry of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel openly denounced the Elector as an inebriate, whereat the latter wrote a letter admitting his ineptitude, "after the German custom," but said the Duke of Braunschweig was not the man to find fault, for he was an even harder drinker. Luther on one occasion refers to the appearance of the Electoral courtiers on the morning after a nightly

⁸⁶ Weimar ed., Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 358 sqq.; Erl. ed., Vol. XXXIII, pp. 214 sqq.

⁸⁷ Weimar ed., Vol. LI, pp. 200 sqq. and LIII, pp. 679 sqq.; Erl. ed., Vol. XXXIX, pp.

265 sqq.

⁸⁸ *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. IV, n. 4933; cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, p. 203. Steinhäusen (*Kulturgeschichte der Deutschen*, p. 398) calls John Frederick quite simply a drunkard.

carousal, and says that their heads appeared to have been immersed in salt brine during the night.

A work to which Luther was sincerely devoted was his exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians, which he composed in Latin in 1535. It was well known that he deemed this Pauline Epistle to be the grand citadel of his doctrine.

In 1533 he produced his controversial work, "On the Corner-Mass and the Ordination of Clerics,"⁸⁹ which his friend Jonas characterized as an effective battering-ram against the papacy. The opposition which his neighbors offered to the innovations he had introduced into the divine service, was the occasion which once more induced him to attack the Mass, so dear to all good Catholics. The fiction of his nocturnal disputation with the devil, which he elaborated with great skill in this book, has become famous. The devil tries to make Luther despond because he was guilty of saying many Masses whilst still a monk, and therefore, was guilty of sacrilege. The abomination of the Mass is cleverly explained by the devil, and Luther's excuses are repudiated; he is told that he must regard himself as lost in the sight of God. He says it required his utmost efforts to retain hope for his own salvation whilst repenting of his former blindness. Some Catholic apologists have erroneously assumed that this clever bit of fiction was a confession on Luther's part that his objections to the Mass had been inspired by the devil. To the attentive reader, the objections are discernible as typical of Luther, but the disputing devil is a literary device and the overwhelming fear by which Luther pretends to have been suffocated, is pure fiction. Luther expresses the wish that all who celebrate Mass be afflicted by a similar mental agony. Such is the *punctum saliens* of the much discussed disputation.

In his treatise "On the Corner-Mass" Luther repudiated both the sacrificial character of the Mass and the Real Presence of Christ on the altar without communion. This was explained by some of his friends in the sense that, like the Sacramentarians, he denied that Christ became really present in the Eucharist by virtue of the words of institution. In the beginning of 1534 he explained this point

⁸⁹ Weimar ed., Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 183 sqq.; Erl. ed., Vol. XXXI, pp. 307 sqq. Cfr. Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 518 sqq. "Corner-Mass" (*Winckelmesse*) is a contemptuous term applied to the Mass because, according to Catholic doctrine, it is equally valid whether celebrated by the priest alone in a lonely chapel or amid a concourse of faithful who unite their prayers with his and communicate with him. (Grisar, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 519 sq.).

in a published letter,⁹⁰ in which he contended that Christ was not present in private Masses, when the priest was the sole celebrant, because there was no communion of the faithful; and that the Eucharist, because it was essentially a food, was to be distinguished from the Mass, just as God is to be differentiated from the devil. "May God"—this is his prayer—"may God bestow upon all pious Christians courage, so that, when they hear the word Mass, they may bless themselves as if they were in the presence of a Satanic abomination!"⁹¹

Luther's work, "On the Servile Will," which he launched against Erasmus, was answered by the latter in a vigorous and triumphant pamphlet, entitled "Hyperaspistes," published in 1526. It was an ingenious exposure of the heresies and distortions of Luther.

For a long time Luther was silent, without, however, recovering from the blow which had been administered to him. He was very much pained at the secession of the Erasmian humanists from his party, maintaining that he was justified in being angry at Erasmus because the latter, although professedly a member of the Church, minimized, nay, destroyed the essence of the Christian religion by his strictures, couched in playful and polished form. In the course of an embittered conversation, in 1532, he called Erasmus "a rogue by nature," who regarded the Blessed Trinity as ridiculous, and added: "Erasmus is as certain that there is no God, as I am certain that I see." Although that charge was a product of his hateful imagination, Luther continued to indulge in similar declarations until he finally believed them himself.

A letter from his old friend, Nicholas Amsdorf of Magdeburg, caused him to vent his pent-up wrath. On January 28, 1534, Amsdorf wrote him a letter, composed with his customary fervor, in which he said he could observe the "intervention and the miracles of God" in favor of the Gospel all around him. God, he said, produced the faith, just as He had wrought the Resurrection of Christ. George Witzel, Luther's enemy, who attacked the gospel of salvation, he said, was dependent upon Erasmus, from whom he borrowed all his weapons. Erasmus would have to be "thoroughly unmasked" by Luther "on account of his ignorance and malice." He (Amsdorf) advised Luther to perform this task in a book on the Church, since the attitude of the Erasmian party towards the Church constituted their vulnerable spot.

⁹⁰ Weimar ed., Vol. XXXVIII, p. 262; Erl. ed., Vol. XXXI, p. 377.

⁹¹ *Briefwechsel*, Vol. X, pp. 8 sqq.; about March 11, 1534.

Luther was immensely pleased with Amsdorf's letter, but, being occupied with other matters, deferred writing the suggested treatise on the Church until 1539. However, he forthwith printed Amsdorf's letter and accompanied it by a furious attack upon Erasmus in the form of a reply to his friend at Magdeburg.⁹² Resorting to the worst kind of distortions and disparagements, he tries to demonstrate that the sole purpose of Erasmus was to bring all Christian doctrine into disrepute, that he was another cynical Democritus, a second Epicurus. Melanchthon, in a letter to Erasmus, pronounced the rash publication of Luther's reply a lamentable blunder. Another friend of Erasmus, Boniface Amerbach, characterized Luther's pamphlet as "the product of a diseased brain" and asserted that Luther had been suffering from paresis (*cephalæa*) for more than a year.⁹³

The calumnies which Luther had heaped upon the aged scholar of Rotterdam were too monstrous for him to leave unanswered. He gave vent to his indignation in a sarcastic Latin rejoinder: "*Purgatio adversus Epistolam non Sobriam M. Lutheri.*"⁹⁴ He treats Luther as one who is drunk or mentally unbalanced. He convicts him of a long series of bare-faced lies. In his indignation, the maltreated scholar asserts that "no text is safe against his violent distortions, based upon premeditated calumny." Rather than admit the justice of Luther's malevolent charge that Erasmus was bent upon fostering infidelity, "the world will believe that Martinus has become demented through hatred, or that he suffers from some other mental disorder, or is dominated by an evil spirit."

Thereafter Luther preferred to observe silence in public; but in the company of his intimates, he expressed himself harshly about Erasmus. "This man," he said, "simply insists on believing what the pope believes"; but, "the Italians are hypocrites." "I fear," he also said, "that he [Erasmus] will die a wretched death." Not long afterwards, in 1536, Erasmus died in the city of Basle, where, due to the prevalence of the new religion, he was unable to receive the last Sacraments. He passed away, loyal to his religion and filled with sincere piety, as even the reports to Wittenberg announced, adding that his last words were: "I will bless the mercy of the Lord and His judgments." Luther did not wish to believe this, and in his Table Talks represents Erasmus's death as that of an unbelieving Epicurean. "He lived

⁹² Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, pp. 181 sq.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 182 sq.

⁹⁴ Amerbach had judged Luther's attack "insane"; Erasmus, on his part, addressed his biting reply to "one not sober." (Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, p. 184.)

in a presumptuous security," he said, "and thus died (*securissime vixit, sicut etiam morixit*)."⁹⁵ As late as 1544, Luther derisively says of Erasmus: "He passed away *sine crux et sine lux*"—without the Cross and without light.⁹⁵

The great and decisive convention of the Schmalkaldic League assembled February 9, 1537, a year after the death of Erasmus.

⁹⁵ Grisar, *Luther*, Vol. IV, p. 185; *Tischreden*, Weimar ed., Vol. IV, n. 3963; 4028; 4899; 5670.

CHAPTER XV

SESSION OF THE SCHMALKALDIC LEAGUE, 1537. LITERARY BATTLES. LUTHER'S CO-WORKERS

I. THE SCHMALKALDIC ARTICLES. REPUDIATION OF THE PROPOSED GENERAL COUNCIL BY THE SCHMALKALDIANS

In view of the prevailing conditions, in particular the attitude of France, the prospects of summoning an ecumenical council, which had been the object of Vergerio's negotiations with Luther, were rather unfavorable. Nevertheless, Paul III, who was intent upon reform and the defense of Catholicism, adhered to the project and fixed the date of the council for May 23, 1537. Mantua was designated as the city where the council was to assemble. For the purpose of definitively winning over the Protestants to the idea of an ecumenical council, the Pope ordered Van der Vorst to visit Germany as his legate. The Emperor, who had intended to convoke a national council, for a while contemplated making concessions to and peaceful covenants with the estates who adhered to the new religion, in order to gain their assistance in his campaign against the Turks. But when it had been announced that the great convention of the Schmalkaldic League was to be held on February 9, 1537, Charles V sent his counselor Held to persuade the Protestants to participate in the council which they had so often demanded. Vergerio, the papal nuncio, also hastened to Schmalkalden.

Meanwhile the strength of the League had increased. The agreement was renewed for a period of ten years. Accompanied by a large retinue, the Protestant princes and the representatives of the cities entered the small town of Schmalkalden. They were accompanied by a large number of theologians—larger than any that had yet appeared at a similar assembly. It was intended that the convention should be not only extraordinarily solemn, but also decisive. Elector John Frederick of Saxony, an enthusiastic follower of Luther, would have preferred if the latter had issued a summons for a council of his own,