

MARTIN LUTHER.

TWO VIEWS.

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By John M. Todd and others.

[In this pamphlet we present two views on the life of Martin Luther written by two eminent Catholic Scholars. In this first article, by John Todd, a sincere and irenic effort is made to build a bridge of understanding between Catholics and Lutherans by attempting to portray Luther in the most positive light possible.

In the second article, H.O. Evennett describes the work of Luther in such a way that would sound a note of caution in a too eirenical approach to the disaster which Christendom endured at the time of the Reformation.

An excellent and recent study of some of the issues raised by these two viewpoints can be found in the pamphlet: **“WHAT DID LUTHER REALLY WANT? A Contribution to Dialogue with Protestants”** by BRIAN W.

HARRISON which can be accessed at

<http://www.pamphlets.org.au/australia/acts1694.html>

It is strongly recommended.]

Part One.

MARTIN LUTHER.

By John M. Todd.

Young Luther.

Hans and Margaret Luther saw that young Martin was a promising child. Instead of apprenticing him in his father's copper mining business, they sent him off to a boarding school at Eisenach. They had respectable relations there who ran a charity for old people. One of them held the office of mayor the year that Martin went there.

Like everyone else, Martin was in and out of church. He had a strong musical streak in him and from an early age loved the chant, the ritual and the traditional melodies, secular and religious. At school he learnt the usual things at the heart of which lay the science of constructing good sentences. He remembered going round the town with songs 'to beg for bread' as the tradition was. And he remembered some over-severe teachers, and others more gracious. The Head Master was one of the latter, and always raised his scholar's beret as he arrived in front of the class saying: 'God may intend many of them for burgomasters, chancellors, scholars, rulers.'

At the age of seventeen, in the year 1501, Martin went off to University. He was impressed by the great town of Erfurt where there were eight houses of monks and friars, a large cathedral, and the University. The cathedral, still to be seen, was built immediately beside an older church, also still there. Behind them, higher up the hill, was a Carthusian monastery. Rules were strict at the University, but Martin found time to play the lute, and to read enough secular literature and Latin classics for him to be able to quote widely from them for the rest of his life. Student life seems to have been normal - Luther's college had the nickname 'beer bag'.

As an undergraduate Martin Luther continued his studies of the written and spoken word, together with some elementary philosophy and theology. Soon like all other university people he would be bilingual; all his academic work including his letters to colleagues would be in Latin - plus the occasional German expletive or idiom. [All his life Luther was troubled by coarse language and abundant explicatives.] He used to walk the forty miles home. On

one such occasion he cut his leg badly with the short sword, which he carried on cross country journeys. Weapons were widely carried, and there was a special rule banning them from examinations; people might get too excited. Many students only lasted for one, or two years, dropping out in large numbers. In the third year Luther passed his finals in second place out of seventeen.

Graduation early in 1505 was a grand affair. Luther wrote later: 'What a glorious thing it was when the degrees were conferred on the new masters, and torches were carried before them in their honour.' And now what? Luther's father wanted him to study law and Martin bought the books, notably the great book of Canon Law, *Corpus Juris Canonici*. The undergraduate term had ended in April, and Luther started work again in the early summer. At the end of June there was a break covering the period from the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 28) to the Feast of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary (July 2). He went home for it. On the way back one of the frequent summer thunderstorms which still build up quickly in this heavily wooded area broke out. Lightning flashed right beside Luther, and knocked him to the ground, without otherwise injuring him. In his terror he swore he would become a monk. The idea must surely have been in his mind for it to come out so easily.

Augustinian Friar.

Within a fortnight, to the intense annoyance of his father, who had hoped for a fine career for him, Luther was a postulant at the house with the best reputation in Erfurt. He had passed his finals high and they were glad to have him. It was a house of Augustinian Friars, recently reformed.

In the friary it was back to theological study again. Luther found the discipline, even the quite severe fasts, welcome. In those days a monk or friar was normally advanced rapidly to the priesthood. In 1507, only twenty-one months after reception as a novice, Luther found himself preparing for his ordination at the age of twenty three. [This lack of preparation of priestly candidates was one of the many reforms eventually addressed by the Council of Trent.] Life was beginning to weigh on him. He was subject to bouts of depression. He was also a perfectionist and was overawed by the ideals to which he must adhere and the responsibilities which were about to become his. An early sign of his anxieties appeared on the day of his first Mass.

As he began to read the opening words of the Canon, *Te igitur clementissime Pater*, 'Therefore O most merciful Father. . . ' Luther was overcome suddenly by a kind of identity crisis. Years later he described his sudden feelings thus: ' . . . shall I, a miserable pygmy, say I want this, I ask for that? For I am dust and ashes and I am speaking to the living, eternal and true God.' He made as if to leave the altar. But the Prior, who was standing by to steady the new priest, turned Father Martin back. The Mass proceeded as normal. After Mass there was a party. Luther's father had relented, and had come over to the Friary on horseback with a party of friends and a substantial gift to the community. But the loss of his son's expected career still rankled, and when the party was under way and the drink was flowing he twitted young Martin about his vow in the thunderstorm, saying he hoped it wasn't a devil who had prompted him. Luther expostulated and his father reminded him of the biblical injunction to honour his father and mother. It was a moment of decided embarrassment. For Luther it was more. He would often return to his father's words in his writing.

Luther progressed rapidly in the friary, proceeding to teach the young students whilst following further studies in the University. He advanced more swiftly than some colleagues thought proper, to the theological degree of Sententiarious in 1509, which enabled him to lecture in theology at the University. [Luther was undoubtedly of a very high intelligence, but one can share his confreres doubts about the prudence of his rapid advancement when one considers his later stubborn arrogance in face of the authority of the Tradition of the Church.] In 1510 Luther accompanied an older friar on an 800 mile journey on foot to Rome to try to settle a dispute between the friary and the Superior of all the friaries in the Province. On his return Luther found himself in a minority among the friars in support of central authority in the Order. Shortly after, Luther was transferred to the smaller friary at Wittenberg.

Wittenberg had a small, young University for which the Augustinians had a major responsibility. To his horror, thinking himself too young, Luther was told to prepare to take a Doctorate. At twenty eight he was appointed Professor of Bible at Wittenberg University in 1512.

The man who had picked Luther out for promotion was his Provincial Superior, Johann von Staupitz. He saw that Luther's enormous energy and outstanding ability, in spite of a nervous and depressive temperament, deserved and

needed employment. [Staupitz plays a strange role in the drama of Luther's rebellion. He finally joined Luther in abandoning his solemn vows of religion and adopting the new Lutheran creed.]

Other members of the Order seemed to share his confidence. Fr Martin was elected sub-prior of the friary at Wittenberg in the autumn of 1512. Two and a half years later he was appointed Vicar Provincial, a post under Staupitz which involved visiting eleven friaries and taking important and effective decisions. One of Luther's letters surviving from this period is a firm but gentle letter deposing a Prior because of disunity and failure in discipline in his friary. Another one is to the Prior of Erfurt, telling him to see that the Friary's guest house in that busy town did not become a mere hotel: 'Watch the food and drink.'

Crisis.

Luther lived the normal life of a friar, reciting the Psalter in choir each week, teaching in the friary and the University. He became the most popular special preacher in the town church, and was fast becoming the bright young man of Wittenberg. The lecture hall was full when Luther was speaking. We have enough original material to have an idea what attracted people. There are Luther's own annotations in the great tomes he used for his early lectures on Augustine, and we have good texts for his University lectures on the Psalms given in 1513, Romans (1515) and Galatians (1516), and for some of his early sermons.

Luther's approach was dynamic and very personal. He spoke as one committed. His material was always intelligent and also imaginative. He objected to a philosophical approach to the gospel, and indeed to theology. He preferred the approach of St. Augustine to that of St. Thomas Aquinas and the later scholastics. And he always expressed himself strongly. Aristotle he refers to in his personal notes as the 'rancid philosopher'. In the margin of a telling text of Augustine he wrote, 'beautiful, beautiful'. People were attracted also by the nervous energy and the feeling that the man who spoke had suffered and knew what he was talking about. Under the surface desperate feelings were indeed making themselves felt. They joined forces with an unsolved theological problem at the intellectual level, to precipitate a personal crisis.

Luther felt he could never live up to the ideals put before him, that he could never earn the merit he was supposed to do. As soon as he had been to confession he thought he must go again. [He suffered terribly from scruples.] The arms of Jesus on the cross seemed to loom over him threateningly. Sometimes the bouts of depression became intolerable. In this misery, moments of suffering sometimes became so intense that he said he thought if they had lasted for as much as a tenth of an hour 'he would have ceased to exist completely . . . at such a time God seems terribly angry . . . All that remains is the stark naked desire for help and a terrible groaning . . . the person is stretched out with Christ so that all his bones may be counted.' From such suffering, Luther developed his 'Theology of the Cross', a development of the piety and mysticism centred on the passion which was widespread in the late medieval Church. The cross remained central to Luther's preaching and theology for the future, and it provided genuine comfort to himself.

But the central problem remained: How can man measure up to God? How could man be justified in God's eyes? Theologically the problem had been posed for centuries: Could man do anything good at all without the assistance of grace? The late medievals often said that man could do something and that he 'must do what he could'. Natural man could do his bit. But Luther found this simply to be untrue for himself. Far from man being able to do anything it was God who did everything. Man was never able to obey God's law fully. The only answer for Luther was to throw oneself into God's hands and believe, put one's entire trust in Jesus Christ. Grace alone, according to Luther, enabled man not only to keep the law but live the life of charity to which he was called by the Word of God in the Bible.

Born again.

There are a number of texts in which Luther described how he came to see that this was what the Bible said, [at least in his opinion] and how it was like a complete new revelation, an understanding, which at last lifted the burden from his shoulders.

[Not one father of the early Church taught Luther's doctrine of justification, and Luther himself became well aware of this, although he felt that some of the earlier doctors of the Church - Ambrose, Bernard, Bonaventure, and above all Augustine - came closer to the truth than others. On the whole, he did not find the fathers profitable on what he

saw as the essence of the Gospel:

"Jerome may be read for historical reasons, for on faith and the doctrine of the true religion he does not have a word. Origen I have already banned. Neither does Chrysostom rate with me. He is a mere prattler. Basil is worthless; he is quite the monk; I should not give a nickel for him. *The Apology of Philip* {Melanchthon - Luther's latter fellow-reformer} is better than all the doctors of the church, also Augustine himself." (Plass 1959, I: 313-14). {E. M. Plass (ed.) "*What Luther Says: an Anthology*." 3 vols. St Louis, Missouri, 1959.}]

It is clear that this new 'revelation' occurred as a series of insights between 1513 and 1518. But Luther speaks of one occasion occurring in a room in the tower of the friary, and this is sometimes referred to as the 'tower-experience'. In the last year of his life he was persuaded to write an introduction to a collection of his Latin works, and he set down there what he understood to have occurred:

'Though I lived as a religious without reproach, I felt I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. . . I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. . . ' Then he turned to St. Paul's words in the Letter to the Romans: 'He shall live who is righteous' God justifies all who believe, in just the same way as he had justified Abraham on account of his faith.'

Until this time the word 'penitence' and the word 'righteous' had both been threatening words for Luther - the righteous God never satisfied with the penitent sinner. But now the scene was transformed.

Staupitz helped by telling Luther that repentance began not with the love of self (as some sophisticated writers had said) but with the love of God. Another confirmation of Luther's approach was Erasmus's fresh translation of the New Testament where he translated the word *metanoieite* more correctly, not as 'do penance', as Jerome had done in the Vulgate [the result of repentance], but as 'change your heart', be converted.

Luther said Staupitz's words 'stuck in me like some sharp and powerful arrow and I began from that time on to look up what the Scriptures teach about penitence. And then, what a game began. The words came up to me on every side jostling one another and smiling in agreement so that where before there was hardly any word in the whole of Scripture more bitter to me than *poenitentia*, now nothing sounds sweeter or more gracious.' He said the same of 'righteousness'. Instead of a vision of man struggling hopelessly to achieve righteousness, he saw the gracious God justifying the man who believes the Word of God. The faithful man, always a sinner, is yet always justified.

'I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise . . . a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself. . . I found analogies in other phrases, the work of God, that is what God does in us; the power of God, with which he makes us strong, etc.' So the justice of God for Luther was no longer his power condemning man but his power justifying the believer.

The Ninety-five Theses.

Luther, now thirty-three, published his first two books, one a new edition of a book inspired by Rhineland mysticism, the other a translation into German of the seven penitential psalms. And it was now, 1516-17, that he won over his colleagues in the University to his brand new theology of faith, a theology he said was based on Augustine, the Bible and the early Fathers, but excluding much of the later philosophical theology usually termed scholastic. Of later theologians St. Bernard was his favourite. [However, Luther really had no time for any of the Fathers, since they had failed to discover his (Luther's) 'great' insight. See his words quoted above.]

At this time also Luther began, like many people across Europe, to criticise corruption in the Church. [Sadly, there was much corruption to criticise.] He especially singled out the aspects which were incompatible with his theology, such as the merit-earning activities of popular devotion, particularly those aimed at gaining Indulgences.

[Indulgences are so often misunderstood that it would be wise to pause and revise our knowledge of authentic Catholic teaching on indulgences. Please consult John O'Brien's little masterpiece: *Indulgences – What are They?*

This 8 page pamphlet is available at

<http://www.pamphlets.org.au/australia/acts1338.html>

It will help us understand Luther's times.]

In Wittenberg the Elector had a great Museum of Relics and every year on All Saints' Day a special Indulgence

could be gained by visiting it and venerating the relics contained in it, such as the remains of the one of the Holy Innocents, a phial of the Virgin's milk, and many other such - 5,003 of them altogether. They remind us of Chaucer's Pardoner, with his documents from Rome and his chicken bones masquerading as relics. Although universally criticised such things were never stamped out. Large sums of money were collected as a result of the encouragement to the faithful to contribute to some good cause and gain an Indulgence. The deceptions often practised were only a part of a whole range of activities widely recognised as in need of reform. Many programmes of reform had been set on foot in Rome but had come to nothing. Why?

From about the year 400 as the Roman Empire collapsed and nomadic tribes infiltrated into Europe from the east, the institutional Church, in effect the bishops and clergy, the monks and nuns, became the major partners in the creation of Christian Europe, in fact of European civilisation itself. The Church became very powerful and wealthy and eventually it grew into a complex institution spread across Europe; it could hardly be recognised as the Church described in the New Testament for it was no longer a seed but a mighty cedar of Lebanon, but many of its branches were diseased. So involved had the Church become in all aspects of society, including its political and financial aspects, that any attempt to reform it, if successful, would mean a major upheaval in society itself. [thus so many medieval Councils, including Lateran V of 1512-1514 had legislated for reform but had failed to enforce it.] Failure to reform led to widespread cynicism about Church officials and institutions; but the vicious circle of total involvement made reform almost impossible without a violent rupture of some kind. Reform had to wait for the Council of Trent.

Luther looked behind the many corrupt practices to the theology which justified them. To him some of the practices looked like an absolute contradiction of the gospel as he now understood it. How could the gospel which told a man that 'he must lose his life to save it' be turned into a scheme for gaining merit by cash contributions? Yet at first Luther was so sure of the true spiritual authority of the Church and the theology it promulgated that he tried to construct theories to justify Indulgences. It was in this frame of mind, intellectually, that he wrote his *Ninety-Five Theses*. He may or may not have nailed these up on the castle church door: this was a normal way for a university teacher to invite fellow academics to challenge or discuss his views. He certainly sent them to his Archbishop on 31 October 1517, All Saints' Eve. The Archbishop was no paragon of Catholic virtue, by any means but he detected in Luther's Theses a denial not only of abuses of Indulgences, but a denial of the doctrine itself and the underlying authority of the Church to issue them.

Luther's emotional involvement and his real theological insight got the better of him in the accompanying letter to the Archbishop which criticised abuses in the preaching of a local Indulgence. After a very humble opening he ended with prophetic words: 'Oh, great God! The souls committed to your care, excellent Father, are thus directed to death. For all these souls you have the heaviest and a constantly increasing responsibility. . . No man can be assured of his salvation by an episcopal function!'

Encounter with Rome.

The Archbishop, Albrecht of Hohenzollern, Prince of Brandenburg, still in his twenties, owing large sums of money to Rome on account of holding bishoprics both at too early an age and in plurality, was very annoyed. He had issued the Indulgence Luther was criticising, partly to contribute funds for the building of St. Peter's in Rome (the present basilica) and partly to pay the bankers, the Fugger, who had funded his Roman debts. The preacher of the Indulgence, a Dominican called Tetzel, was also very annoyed. His abuse of the doctrine of Indulgences had been exposed, but so also had Luther's denial of the Pope's power of the keys.

Little as Luther guessed it, both the Archbishop and the Preacher set wheels in motion immediately to have Luther's theology examined by Rome, and if necessary to have him declared to be a heretic - thus threatening him with death by burning by the secular authority, which regarded heresy as treasonable. Both Albrecht and Tetzel were indeed convinced that an examination of Luther's theses would confirm their opinion that they WERE heretical.

In August 1518 Luther received the first document from Rome, a summons to answer charges of heresy. He saw with horror something of the style and intention of the theology which was to be put against his:

' . . . in the New Law the Pope's judgment is the oracle of God.' Luther himself was called 'a leper . . . a dog and the son of a bitch, born to snap and bite at the sky . . . with a brain of brass and a nose of iron.' {Regrettably such was the arrogant style of 'ad hominem' denunciation of heresy at the time. It is a pity that a more theological answer

was not given to Luther's theological difficulties.] This was no response to the lengthy, carefully argued *Explanations* which Luther had written and sent to the Pope with a letter of loyalty three months earlier. Many historians have questioned the sincerity of this letter in view of the subsequent events. He was to write on 13 March 1519: "I am at a loss to know whether the pope be antichrist or his apostle"

Two months later Luther was informally examined at Augsburg by Cardinal Cajetan, papal legate in Germany and Cardinal Protector of the Dominicans. Cajetan was in a difficult position because he agreed with much of Luther's criticism of Indulgences. Cajetan could see that there had been much abuse in the preaching of indulgences. But Cajetan was also committed to a high doctrine of the papacy. In other words, Cajetan was and remained Catholic in his understanding of the powers entrusted to Peter and his successors. Luther had criticised the theory of the 'Treasury of Merits', as not contained in Scripture. But it was contained in a papal decretal and must therefore be accepted as authentic, said Cajetan. He objected also to Luther's insistence that a penitent must believe in his or her forgiveness. The Church had always maintained that Sacramental forgiveness worked 'ex opere operatio' or of the very power of the Sacraments themselves, as being gifts from Christ, Our Lord. Cajetan demanded that Luther recant. Luther refused. Their three interviews ended in stalemate, with the threat of the death penalty now hanging over Luther.

As feared, a document was delivered a few weeks later to Luther's sovereign, the Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, requesting that he either hand Luther over for formal examination as a heretic or send him into exile. The Elector consulted the University of Wittenberg, and then declined to follow either course. The motive seems to have been that he genuinely agreed with Luther and his colleagues that by the criterion of the teaching of the Bible, ignoring the appeal to the authority and tradition of the Church, Luther had not been proved wrong. The Elector was also undoubtedly reluctant to bring his lively young University into disrepute. Moreover, as a good German, he resented the orders of an Italian Pope. It was a crucial decision.

Fourteen months after the writing and dissemination of the Ninety-Five Theses Luther was becoming famous, on account not so much of his theology as of his encounter with Rome. Erasmus's publisher in Basle, Froben, on the look-out for texts which would be in demand, published a collection of his writings with an *Introduction* which speaks significantly of Luther as a Daniel in the Lion's Den - an *Introduction* which was not signed. Listeners began to copy down every sermon Luther preached and have them printed. Often these were inaccurate records of Luther's words, and he had to issue correct versions. He had become a public figure. People began to line up for and against him. In the summer of 1519 at Leipzig there was a great public debate at which the renowned conservative theologian Johann Eck forced Luther to consider the matter not so much of his theology and Indulgences, but of authority and the Church.

Luther was not one to leave problems unattended to. He began reading widely on the Church and its history, and its nature as evidenced in the Bible. The following year, 1520, the results of this research began to pour from his cell. First however came a *Sermon on Good Works*, in answer to queries whether his theology of faith meant that Christians were absolved from good behaviour. He trounced the absurd notion. Genuine good works, however, he said came from genuinely faithful people. It was no good being a 'do gooder' on a superficial level. But from Christians who believed the Word of God, works of justice and charity would flow inevitably and were to be praised.

Many plans for the reform of the Church had been announced in the previous hundred years. None had been taken up effectively by the Church authorities. In these circumstances Luther abandoned all notion of historical hierarchy and said it was up to the generality of members of the Church to take up the challenge, and principally to those in society who had power. Thus the seeds were sown that would turn the church of Christ into the churches of the Princes, a mere department of state. So he wrote in German his *Appeal to the German Nobility*. With this text he got into his stride, and he followed it with a Latin piece for the theologians on *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* - captive to Rome viciously anti-papal in tone.. In the autumn of this crucial year he wrote a long essay on *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, which still stands as an exceptionally able and inspiring text on the Christian vocation. In all these texts Luther incorporated his own unique findings about the nature of the Church as he had found it expressed in the Bible. They were devastating. And they were presented with an aggressive and sometimes bitter virulence.

He found only three sacraments – this in contrast to the seven sacraments that the Church had up till then proclaimed. He found that all baptised Christians were priests and so he abolished any concept of a special sacramental priesthood. He found therefore also that priests need not be celibate a conclusion embraced by a remarkable number of the German clergy, a sign perhaps of the spiritual poverty of so many of the vocations in that country. He said the laity should receive the wine at Mass, agreeing in this with the Hussite heretics. He said that the Church's 'failure to preach the Gospel in its fullness' and its manipulation of laity by its control of the sacraments (issuing bans for purely secular reasons) proved that the papacy was Antichrist. It had betrayed the gospel. Thus proclaimed Luther.

These were the most immediately stunning of his assertions. When set alongside his dynamic personal religion and his theology of faith, in a context of the general German nationalist consensus of criticism of the Church authorities and put into the mouth of a man of exceptional intellectual ability, a linguist and a poet, the result was a mixture of great explosive potential. Explosions were in any case welcome among those numerous German speaking people who resented the apparently arrogant Italian churchmen who were responsible for the flow of funds from Northern Europe to Rome.

One more factor completes the picture. For the first time, in every town and village, the travelling merchants now carried printed material, not only of a pious nature or popular songs, but on controversial issues. Luther's pieces were rapidly disseminated, they made quick profits as they were in such high demand, and the literate members of society read them out in the market places. They presented a searing condemnation of the activities of the Church authorities, and a definition of the Church which ran counter to the everyday reality of the Church of Christendom that the townsfolk had up till then known. It was a revolution that was being proposed, and people soon began to wonder how long the Reverend Professor, Dr Martin Luther, the Augustinian Friar at Wittenberg University, would survive.

The Reformation begins.

To Cajetan's dismay - he wanted Luther only to be warned - the more aggressive forces at Rome got the ear of Pope Leo X and Luther's teaching was condemned in May 1520 in the papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*. [Cajetan knew Luther to be in error but believed he could be reconciled, not by threats but by appeal to Scripture and the application of theological reason,] He was declared to be a heretic unless he recanted. The text was as unworthy as that which he had been sent from Rome in 1518. [Again it relied on obedient submission and failed to provide the rationale for the orthodox position. It employed the standard 'ad hominem' approach to perceived heretics.] It opened with the stirring words: 'Arise, Lord, vindicate your cause against the fierce foxes who are trying to destroy your vineyard . . . against the wild boar. . . .' Luther was the wild boar. Among other things, the text declared it was heretical 'to say that it was contrary to the will of the Spirit to burn heretics. . . .' [This was standard Medieval and renaissance jurisprudence, however distasteful it sounds in modern ears.]

On the day on which Luther became automatically a heretic for failing to appear for examination, his colleague at Wittenberg, Philip Melancthon, Professor of Greek, arranged a bonfire at the trash heap outside the city. The Canon Law, symbol of a legalistic Church, was solemnly burnt - and Luther threw on to the fire the excommunication text.

The new young Emperor, the Spanish and French speaking traditionalist Charles Habsburg, now Charles V, summoned Luther to his first Diet. [To the best of his lights Charles was a good Catholic. He retired to a monastery towards the end of his life to prepare for eternity. How many absolute rulers do you know who abdicate their crowns to prepare to meet their maker?] To his surprise a majority of the Electors and others attending the gathering at Worms were not of a mind to accept the excommunication of Luther as an automatic definition of treason. [Charles was surprised by the level of German nationalist anti-foreign (Spanish and Italian) sentiment.] However, as soon as some of them had departed, Charles was able to command a majority to agree to a formal imperial ban on Luther and this was duly issued in May 1521.

Luther's Sovereign, the aged Elector, Frederick the Wise, was in a dilemma. He and his advisers concocted a plan, with Luther's agreement, to kidnap him on his return journey to Wittenberg and take him into a secret place of protective custody - the Wartburg up above Luther's boyhood town of Eisenach. He was given clothes to wear that would make him look like a Prussian land-owner, a Junker, taking a rest and told to grow a beard. Soon, only the

eyes were left to tell anyone who it really was.

At Wittenberg Luther's colleagues in both the University and the friary felt they should take steps to put Luther's principles into practice. [This was now a religious revolution.] They began to celebrate 'mass', omitting the references to it as a 'sacrifice', communicating the wine to the laity [just as the Hussite heretics had done, and for similar reasons], and wearing no vestments. Statues were removed. [Shades of the Iconoclasm heresy of the 8th century!] The friars queried the morality of the whole vow-taking process. Some left the friary. Sporadic, unplanned contentious reforms, combined with anticlerical riots by the students, led to something like the beginning of anarchy. The Elector, very worried, wrote asking Luther's advice. Eventually the Town Council begged him to return.

Meanwhile, Luther had been translating the New Testament into contemporary German. The people must have access to the primary source of their faith. In twelve weeks, from December 1521 to March 1522, doing 1,500 words a day, Luther did it. [In total, there had been at least eighteen complete German Bible editions, ninety editions in the vernacular of the Gospels and the readings of the Sundays and Holy Days, and some fourteen German Psalters by the time Luther first published his own New Testament translation.] Until then translations had been very expensive, published sometimes without permission from the Church (and sometimes forbidden if they were accompanied by heretical footnotes), had only been available to the wealthy in vast tomes. [What was especially new was the vast circulation Luther's translation achieved with the co-operation of profit-seeking itinerant book-sellers.]

In the first week in March Luther arrived back. He shaved, put on his Augustinian habit and preached on eight successive days. He told the populace, including his colleagues, that they were behaving in a disorderly fashion, that they were putting a new legalism in place of the old legalism and that they needed to love as well as to believe. In the autumn the New Testament was published in a version available to everyone.

The Reformation had begun. Supported by the Elector, his colleagues, and many of the people, Luther was able to inspire and organise the changes he believed should be made in Wittenberg and district, without interference from imperial or Church authority. [The nationalist anarchy terrified the emperor's and papal authorities.] For the next twenty-four years, until his death, he remained at Wittenberg, the leading man in the University, lecturing and administering, and preaching often in the parish church and district. Increasingly he was consulted by the Elector and other rulers about matters of government. A spate of publications and a great number of letters poured from him. He presided over the translation of the Old Testament, doing much of the work himself.

Luther left the town only occasionally for a local preaching tour or to solve some particular problem, or to go once to the far south of Saxony to the Castle of the Coburg during the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. When the plague visited the town and the University went into exile Luther stayed behind to nurse the ill and lecture to a remaining rump of students. He was, along with Erasmus, one of the two most famous people in Europe. Yet his life was very different from that of other powerful people who were used to moving about as it were on an axis from Rome, through Switzerland, Paris, the Netherlands, to London. Luther never set foot west of the Rhine, the Diet of Worms being the furthest west he preached.

Luther against the Reformers.

Luther was often bothered about the immense changes he had set on foot. Should he have done it? He examined his conscience and came to the conclusion, in spite of the chaos unleashed on Europe, that he had done what he had to do. He was 'reforming the Church'. That is how he saw it. He expected the Pope, and the Bishops in communion with him, gradually to accede to the evident truth of the Gospel as everyone in Wittenberg and in many other parts of Europe saw it. [That is: Wittenberg Luther's version of the gospel. Why couldn't all of Europe see it too?] By the end of his life he became increasingly sad as he saw no real diminution of the power of the papacy in many places, and the continuation of many practices and much of the theology he deplored. Worse still, other more extreme, religious revolutionaries were arising and openly attacking his own reforms, and sometimes the authority of the State itself and what a horror that was for him. Wasn't the State the new ruling and administrative authority in the 'reformed' church?

In many ways Luther was conservative in temper. He had a great respect for civil authority, and nursed romantic

hopes about the young Emperor. At Wittenberg he brought in reforms slowly and with deliberation, resisting the demagogic tendencies of so many others. All through the middle ages there had been movements of men and women claiming inspiration by the Holy Spirit and wishing Christianity to be independent of the established Church. Luther rejected these, as they attempted to take over his own reforming movement. He called them Schwarmerei, Enthusiasts. A typical example of Luther's temper relates to the Eucharist. He always held firmly, against other reformers, to the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine. He did not like the Aristotelian term 'transubstantiation', but insisted on the obvious meaning of the biblical words 'This is my body.' To counter the minimisers and outright opponents of the doctrine he continued to elevate the host at 'mass' in Wittenberg for twenty years.

The Lutheran 'mass' was celebrated with the Roman text, but shorn of references which might encourage the idea that to celebrate mass was to do something intended to appease God, or to earn merit, to offer a sacrifice in the pagan sense as Luther put it. Luther was not averse from using the word 'sacrifice' for the Eucharist when it was used in the sense of a sacrifice of thanksgiving, celebrating the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as the act of salvation. But he believed the use of the word in the canon had come to obscure the essential meaning of the Eucharist. In effect the canon was cut down to not much more than the words of consecration.

During 1522-5 Luther wrote and composed many hymns and carols, some still widely in use. He gradually introduced German into the liturgy, always retaining however a substantial amount of Latin. Working with other musicians he arranged the texts for a sung German 'mass' using his own great musical ability to produce chants which drew their inspiration from Gregorian and folk melody. His liturgical and musical innovations paved the way directly for the emergence of the Bach Chorale.

Last Years.

We still seek a full understanding of the Reformation. The friars in the Augustinian Friary at Wittenburg, when convinced that they could follow their own judgement without damning themselves, simply left the religious life. They were not driven out, rather the opposite. Somehow the life of the vows in many religious houses had lost its inner force and dedication. [This is damning evidence of the poor understanding of the meaning of solemn vows and Catholic mindset of the bulk of religious at this time in northern Europe. Moreover, Luther had written extensively on the non-binding nature of vows of celibacy. It says much that this was one of his most popular treatises.] Luther himself remained at the Friary and continued to wear his habit. But by 1524 there was no-one left except himself, a servant and the Prior, who then also departed! [So much for keeping a solemn vow to God almighty!] People were surprised that whilst the other friars had married, Luther had not. At this time he was trying to find husbands for six nuns who had left their convent. [More infidelity to vow-keeping!] One of them, Catherine [Katherine] von Bora, set her cap at Luther. He was badly in need of someone to look after him. And he had been preaching the spiritual value of marriage from the start of his pastoral ministry. In 1525 they were married. The Elector gave them the old friary for a home. The Archbishop sent a present of twenty gulden {perhaps in an effort to win back this now powerful demagogue}. Twenty-one years of a famous open family life began, students of all ages in and out of the house, taking notes (which made up the *Table Talk*), sharing in the food and the beer.

The Elector and the other authorities and town councils got Luther to help them with plans for education, welfare, parish visiting and organisation. He wrote texts for them. He wrote a *Short Catechism* and a *Long Catechism*. As the response to his initiatives grew, political problems emerged. What if the Emperor should try by force to reverse the changes and restore traditional Catholicism? Should the Elector and others resist? Luther said, No. Later the lawyers persuaded him that it was written in to the constitution that one might resist if the Emperor overstepped his powers; and to interfere with the preaching of 'God's word' [as newly promulgated by 'reformers like Luther himself] would be such interference. So from 1531 Luther agreed that resistance was acceptable. But the Emperor was always occupied with wars east, west and south chiefly in resistance to the rising Turkish threat, and the matter did not arise in Luther's lifetime.

The Peasants were chronically restless and Luther [at first] supported their demands for greater economic and social justice. But again he said, even in the face of grave injustice, they should not turn to violence. He appeared, but was not, contradictory because although he had lectured the princes and lords on their obligations in justice to the peasants, when the Peasants Revolt came in 1525 he supported the authorities in putting it down - and did so in

words so violent that they shocked many people. [They shock many people today!]

Luther had an aggressive side to him which his friends deplored [as do any modern readers of his works]. It came out in the later part of his life also against the Jews, the perennial scapegoats of medieval Europe. Luther's disillusionments sometimes centred on them, as well as on the left wing religious reformers. Luther was often ill in the last ten years of his life, and violent words came from him more frequently. But his mind remained clear. During this decade he often preached and lectured on the Bible. His favourite texts were the Gospel and Epistles of St. John, the letter to the Galatians, and Genesis. His favourite topic was the incarnation - the man from God, the man who is God and Man, the Man who is one with God and one with us. Luther died on 18 February 1546, two months after the opening of the Council of Trent. He was on a journey of charity trying to solve a family argument. At his funeral in Wittenberg, Melancthon, one of Luther's most fervent disciples, said God had sent them a severe doctor but that now they were like orphans who had lost a dear noble father.

Luther today.

Within twenty five years of Luther's death his teaching had won the allegiance of a majority of the people in several large German speaking areas. Reform movements had taken root in several other countries in Europe, especially in Scandinavia. The number of those calling themselves Lutherans in the world today has been estimated at seventy million, perhaps half of them Germans. The story of the Reformation and its consequences is an immensely complicated one, but the themes at the centre of Luther's teaching are still those at the heart of Protestantism.

During Luther's lifetime there were Christians who sometimes attended liturgies of both papal and Lutheran persuasions. As late as 1541 at Regensburg there was an attempt to find a way of enabling reconciliation to take place. In recent years there have been great steps forward in the dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Speaking to Lutheran Church leaders in November 1980 during his visit to West Germany Pope John Paul II quoted from the pastoral letter of the German bishops, 'We are happy to discover not simply a partial consensus on some truths but rather a full accord on fundamental and central truths. This makes us hope for a unity also in the sphere of our faith and of our life where, at this moment, we are yet separated.' In other words, although real differences remain between them, Catholics and Lutherans are one in their faith in the central doctrines of Christianity, the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Redemption.

Luther's central insight, his doctrine of the justification of the sinner through faith alone, is now considered by many theologians of both traditions as not in principle running counter to Catholic tradition. Sadly, the possibility of agreement was obscured over the ages by polemics [especially on the fanatical insistence on the (non-scriptural) word 'alone']. Today, a broad consensus is emerging on the doctrine of justification: 'it is solely by grace and by faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit in us that we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit who renews our hearts and equips us for and calls us to good works' (*Catholic-Lutheran Joint Commission statement on the Augsburg Confession, 1980*).

Differences remain. How eventually the papacy can come to be seen in an acceptable light by Lutherans is perhaps more difficult - even though Luther himself did not rule it out in principle. The Catholic theologian Karl Rahner has described his 'Dream' of a future meeting of Church leaders which shows the Pope acting in a way that could be acceptable and possible. The sacraments and the priestly ministry also remain areas of some disagreement. But Luther never became 'Protestant' in the sense of seeing the Church simply as a gathering of individual Christians. His liturgical, sacramental and pastoral style at Wittenberg remained discernibly and intentionally in the catholic tradition. Luther himself may be seen as a 'Prophet' re-affirming the central message of the Christian gospel and saying uncomfortable things about the Church of his time. He was one of those people who are quite happy to allow their rough edges and their failings to be well known. If the cap fitted he would usually wear it.

Part Two.

MARTIN LUTHER.

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NOTE.

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MARTIN LUTHER.

Early Life.

Martin Luther, a miner's son, was born at Eisleben, in Saxony, probably in 1483. Six months after his birth, the family removed to Mansfeld where the child, at the tender age of five, began attendance at the municipal Latin school. At thirteen, he was sent to the school of the Brothers of the Common Life in Magdeburg. Then we find him at St George's school in Eisenach, where he earned his board by singing in the streets. In 1501, he was enrolled in the University of Erfurt and became a Master of Arts there early in 1505. In July of the same year he applied for admission to the monastery of the Augustinians in Erfurt and made his profession there in September, 1506. Less than two years later, he was ordained priest, without so far having made any theological studies. In 1511, he was sent on the business of his Order to Rome, and behaved there like any normally devout Catholic pilgrim. In 1512, at Wittenberg, he claimed to have a revelation from the Holy Ghost about the true meaning of St Paul's text, "The just shall live by faith".

It is not as a mere denouncer of ordinary abuses that we must regard this Augustinian Friar who shook the world, but as the creator of a revolutionary theological doctrine in regard to the method of Salvation - the doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone.

Justification by Faith Alone.

The steps by which Luther, in his monastic years previous to the outbreak of the Indulgence Controversy in 1517, slowly evolved this belief, are now traceable in his early commentaries and lectures, which have fortuitously come to light in the course of the last fifty years, [since 1900,] and the discovery of which, together with Father Denifle's epoch-making book, published in 1904, (** Luther und Luthertum*. Mainz, 1904.) revolutionized Luther-study. Luther lived his busy monastic life under the intermittent pressure of a gnawing doubt as to the possibility of his salvation. His mind craved for a subjective certainty that he had avoided damnation, yet he was so vividly conscious of sin and of the appalling gap between God's goodness and man's puny efforts, that he lost faith in man's power to help himself along the road to Salvation by any actions or works of his own. There is nothing Humanist in this, but rather the reverse ; nothing akin to the religious scepticism and exaltation of humanity of the Italian Renaissance, but a problem of religious psychology posed in typically Teutonic terms. Nor did the helps to which Luther turned reflect contemporary Humanism, either German or Italian. He had only a moderate knowledge of the Latin classics and less of the Greek. He had recourse in turn to the Nominalist Theologians on whom he had been brought up, to the German mystics, and finally to St Augustine.

Gradually, not suddenly, he reached an answer that assuaged the pain of his questionings: Original Sin had totally vitiated man's nature and will, rendering them utterly powerless for good. Man could contribute nothing to his own Justification; to strive for merit was in vain. Salvation could be attained only through the recognition of God's power and willingness to effect redemption by the free imputation of His own goodness to those who put their complete trust in Him to do so.

Luther was aware that this view of the economy of Salvation was original, yet at the same time he also believed it to be Catholic. Indeed, Denifle showed that Luther's interpretation of Romans 1: 17, "Justus autem ex fide vivit" -

"The just man lives by faith", the biblical text on which he chiefly relied, was a medieval commonplace, and that Luther could hardly have been unaware of the many passages in the Liturgy and the Breviary which stressed the place of Faith in Justification. But the revolution in Justification by Faith Alone lay in the *Alone*. In the complete denial of any independent power for good in fallen man was contained in germ all Protestantism - the Unfree Will; Predestination; the attack on Hierarchy and Sacramentalism; the Priesthood of All Believers [and the non-existence of any 'Ministerial Priesthood']; the Invisible Church.

The Indulgence Controversy.

Luther did not, of course, immediately perceive all this. The remorseless drawing out of all the terrible implications of Justification by Faith Alone was the work of the Indulgence Controversy that broke out in October, 1517, and culminated in Luther's excommunication in 1521. In challenging a disputation upon Indulgences, Luther was not so much protesting against the methods by which the Great Indulgence of 1517 was being preached as expressing an uneasy feeling that the whole doctrine, involving as it did the idea of a transfer of merit to wipe out punishment, accorded ill with Justification - total Justification - by Faith Alone. He was denounced to Rome. The methods by which his opponents, Dr Eck especially, conducted the case against him, and the lengths to which, for various reasons, it was drawn out, were not calculated to confine it to the comparatively narrow ground on which it had arisen, but served to make clear all its implications. Luther had the dangerous courage to see his ideas through to the end. By the time of his excommunication he had abandoned the whole Catholic conception of Christianity, had denounced the Pope as anti-Christ, and had made his appeal from ecclesiastical authority to his own interpretation of the Scriptures. The year 1520 was the decisive period, and the three great Reformation Pamphlets of that date, embodying his final position, came as the climax of three years' incessant writing and preaching, and revealed Luther as a pamphleteer of genius.

A National Hero.

We have come to our second problem. Why did this theological controversy become of such enormous significance? Why did this morbid and troubled Friar, hitherto no public figure outside his own order, attain within three years to the status of something like a national hero? Why, all over Germany, did preachers, inside and outside the Catholic Priesthood, rise up like mushrooms overnight, echoing his doctrines, flocking to his standard? Many considerations of different kinds go towards suggesting some explanation of these extraordinary phenomena.

In the first place there were, it would seem, theological centres in which academic opinion had slowly been drifting toward the anti-humanist doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone that Luther had painfully worked out as an anodyne for his own introspective despair. We may see in the works of our own John Colet, and in those of the Picard scholar, Lefevre d'Etaples, who survived until 1536 and never formally renounced Catholicism, an Augustinianism that placed increased emphasis upon the role of Faith in the economy of salvation. And among the German Augustinian Friars of Luther's own order, a revival of the study of St Augustine himself seems to have produced the same effect. Thus there was already some academic backing being formed for the new principle of religion derived from Luther's personal experience, an experience moreover that was thoroughly typical of Germanic psychology and of the subjectivism which had recently found many encouragements. We may believe that there were serious-minded Germans to whom Justification by Faith Alone appealed as it had appealed to Luther. But there were doubtless far more who easily welcomed a doctrine that, by basing itself upon the radical impotence of human nature for good, removed both the possibility and the necessity of heroic achievement and put high moral idealism at a discount. Here Justification by Faith Alone arrived by a different route at the depreciation of asceticism characteristic of the Italian Renaissance. Though the already justified and converted man was expected to perform good works as a sign of his justification, it was a more easily understood teaching that these were not demanded of him in order that he might in the first instance be justified.

But Luther and his case made a far wider appeal than even this. For all kinds of quite extraneous issues became associated with his fight against Rome and the Catholic hierarchy. Every strand of contemporary discontent, swayed by the resounding catchwords of his widely-circulated pamphlets, thought that in the author of *The Liberty of a Christian Man* had arisen the champion of its own particular cause. Not yet aware that the Liberty preached by Luther was essentially an inward spiritual liberty calculated to render material unfreedom immaterial, men thought

that he stood against concrete oppression in all its forms - economic, political, intellectual. And perhaps there was just a moment when he really did. However that may be, he was applauded by the humanists, as the Messiah who, without violent breach with the past, would reform the Church according to the principles of scholarship and the tastes of the classics. The growing urban and mining proletariat, illiterate, their knowledge of the great man derived only from excited gossip, saw in him a saviour from the oppression of their masters. The peasant serfs, for their part, welcomed a champion against feudal and legal injustices. All in time were to be disillusioned. But what gave some verisimilitude to the picture of Luther as every discontented man's champion was the prominent part played in his polemic by the attack upon the Papacy's financial policy. This won for him the support not only of the moneyed classes, resentful of papal taxation, but of all those of his countrymen who suffered from the disguised inferiority complex that the Germans often feel in regard to the Italians.

The Political Issue.

To abuse the Papacy as an oppressive foreign institution by which crafty and easy-living Italians exploited virtuous and sensitive Teutons in questionable Italian interests, was a sure passport to popularity. Instinctively, Luther harped on this theme, with a coarse, passionate, but successful artistry. National feeling in Germany had as yet remained largely incoherent, owing to the lack of a national political framework. The craving for a Leader, satisfied in France by Francis I, and in England by Henry VIII, could in Germany find no satisfaction in either the eccentric Maximilian I or the cold, cautious figure of the young foreigner elected Emperor in 1517 - Charles V. But Martin Luther, the miner's son from Eisleben, personified the German character, its strengths and its failings. His behaviour at the Diet of Worms, though neither so firm nor so theatrical as later legend relates, was at any rate dramatic enough to clinch his success.

That these things could be, says much for the decline which the Church's hold over clergy and laity in Germany had suffered. Yet we must not exaggerate. At no time, even in the full flood of Luther's earliest popularity - and less and less so as time went on - was opinion undivided. Modern research by German Catholic scholars has revealed the fight carried on against Luther by the German Dominicans, and has shown the extent of early German anti-Luther literature. But it remains true that this literary activity, lacking the leadership of a great personality and suffering all the propagandist disadvantages of the defensive side, prevailed but little. In 1521 the "New Preaching," or "New Learning," was finding support all over Germany. Its future, however, was far from clear. Much - perhaps all - would depend upon the attitude adopted by the secular authorities - the Emperor and the German Territorial Princes.

An intensification of lay control over ecclesiastical affairs marked the century which preceded the Reformation, and the independence of the Church constituted the last formidable obstacle in the path of those forces which were moving, through the centralized Renaissance governments, towards the creation of the Modern State. At the same time, the permanent betrayal of orthodoxy by any secular power was regarded as a thing unthinkable. That the secular power in Germany would take cognizance, and unfavourable cognizance, of the "New Preaching" was thus generally regarded as a foregone conclusion. But though the Emperor Charles V, at the Diet at Worms in 1521, forced through a decree putting Luther to the Imperial ban and prohibiting his works and teaching, so low had Imperial authority dwindled that he was unable to enforce the execution of the sentence by the separate principalities. The German Princes were one and all determined that no religious controversy should be used by the Emperor to recover his power over them. At the same time they were not necessarily prepared to crush a new movement which, provided it were not politically or socially disruptive, might conceivably help them both to bring under control the great autonomous ecclesiastical body and to strengthen their independence against Imperial overlordship.

The Political Issue (The Peasants' Revolt).

Luther's own Prince, the Elector of Saxony, at once a friend of humanists and an exploiter of relics and indulgences, chose to protect the heresiarch's person without formally accepting his doctrine or breaking with the Pope. A period of honourable captivity for Luther in the Wartburg was followed by a virtual freedom of action when he returned to Wittenberg in 1522. But at this point the innate conservatism of his temperament began to show itself, and to contradict those of his earlier and wilder utterances which had awoken responses far more profound than were

really consonant with his ideas when shorn of their pamphleteering rhetoric. His feeling for ceremonial and for a Real Presence in the Eucharist drew him into a bitter, but successful, struggle with his more radically-minded follower, Carlstadt. The fanatical revolutionary preaching by which such men as Heinrich Pfeiffer, Thomas Munzer, and the so-called "Zwickau Prophets" were inciting the peasantry and urban workers into insurrection was totally repellent to him. He had perhaps never seriously connected social revolution with the spread of "The Gospel." The Peasants' Revolt of 1524-5 filled him with horror and he came down heavily upon the side of authority, both in speech and writing. This action, while it revealed Luther as a supporter of the established order, and thus as a potential ally of the Princes, deprived him at once of the goodwill of all those elements of social and economic discontent that had at first looked to him and that now turned towards the Anabaptist and Apocalyptic sects, who promised the establishment of God's Justice here on Earth, as well as in the Hereafter.

Considerations of another kind were also preparing the way for the eventual capture of Lutheranism by political forces. The doctrines of the Invisibility of the true Church and the Priesthood of All Believers [to the exclusion of a Hierarchical Priesthood] destroyed the Catholic conception of the Church on earth as a formal institutional Unity with inherent independent juridical powers vested in Pope and hierarchy. There remained instead the idea of local communities representing the projection on to the earthly plane of the Real Invisible Church - the Company of the Elect. In the communities each individual Christian had equal spiritual power; what arrangements might be come to for the organization and ordered exercise of these powers was a matter of local convenience, not of any divine ordinance. As time went on the problem of organization was increasingly forced upon Luther. All was not going as he had hoped. Contrary to his naive expectations his teaching had not swept the board, had not appeared self-evident in the Scriptures to all reasonable men of good-will. His Gospel had not established itself peacefully and uniformly throughout the length and breadth of Germany. Confusion and disorder were increasing.

Already the fissiparous results of the appeal to Scripture alone were becoming evident. The conflict between Luther and Carlstadt was paralleled in every place where the New Preaching appeared. Worst of all, the economic position of the preachers was insecure. They could seldom make good their claim to the Catholic endowments and ecclesiastical machine, even when they themselves had been the local Catholic priests. Luther decided to make his appeal to the secular power, asking it to declare openly for his cause and to take over its organization, in order to give stability and order to the communities. It is a disputed question whether Luther originally held that the Prince, or chief magistrate, was always *ipso facto* the rightful ruler of the Church and wielder of spiritual jurisdiction; or whether he merely held that in the existing circumstances the Prince was the most suitable person to whom the Christian community should entrust the exercise of those powers of Church government which all possessed severally. The point does not affect the upshot. The Elector of Saxony and the Landgrave of Hesse, reassured by Luther's attitude during the Peasants' Revolt, and perceiving their opportunity of abolishing the autonomy of the Church and seizing its wealth, accepted his invitation. In 1526 and 1527 the Catholic Church in their territories was destroyed. State-controlled Lutheran establishments were set up by means of Princely commissions; and the models thus created were followed by the many other German States which, in the course of the next twenty-five years, embraced Lutheranism.

The Political Issue (The Lutheran Princes).

This virtual handing-over of a religious movement to political authority marks the end of what may be called Luther's prophetic period. Henceforward much power, even of doctrinal control, was exercised by the Lutheran Princes. The theory was that doctrine was self-evident from the Bible, and was authoritatively promulgated in such works as Melancthon's *Loci Communes*. But in practice the complete State control of worship and ceremonial implied a certain doctrinal initiative, while the choice between the many conflicting prophets with their varying brands of Lutheranism lay entirely with the Prince.

Its adoption by the State complicated the nature of Lutheranism. Originally a mere system of belief it became in addition a great complex of vested political interests, and any attempt at reconciliation which ignored this fact and took account only of pure theology, was doomed to failure from the first. None the less, many such attempts were made by eirenicly-minded theologians from the fifteen-thirties to the fifteen-fifties, of which the famous Ratisbon Conference of 1541, associated with the name of Cardinal Contarini, came nearest to success. Only six years after the ineffectual ban of Worms, a pronouncement of the Diet of Speyer, in 1526, declared that each Prince should

consult his own conscience in religious policy, and this was interpreted as conceding a freedom of initiative of which advantage was quickly taken. After Charles V's failure to bring about reunion at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, even in face of the Turkish invasions, the Lutheran Princes formed among themselves the League of Schmalkald. Those Princes who remained loyal to Catholicism would undertake no crusade against the innovators for fear of lending themselves to an Imperial revival which all equally dreaded. More conscious of common political aims than of religious diversities, which they assumed to be but temporary, they were prepared to co-operate with each other only against common enemies who seemed to threaten society far more profoundly than did Luther - that is to say, the Turks and the Anabaptists.

Luther's Marriage and Death.

Martin Luther went through a form of marriage with the ex-nun, Katharine von Bora, in 1525, when he was forty-two. Melancthon deplored the marriage, but hoped that the refining influence of his young consort would cure Luther of his habit of making coarse jokes. It had no such result, for his speech and writings grew coarser with the years, and towards the end of his life passed all bounds of decency.

Luther gave his formal written sanction to the second bigamous marriage of the Landgrave Philip of Hesse in 1540. This act of the Doctor has been regarded by some of his warmest admirers, Kostlin for instance, as "the greatest blot on the history of the Reformation."

In 1545, the year before he died, Luther issued two broadsides, entitled *Donkey-Pope* and *Swine-Pope*, embellished with wood-cuts by Lucas Cranach and quatrains by the Doctor himself, which he called his "last will and testament." Both verses and pictures were gross obscenities, which no publisher of our time, not even the lowest, would dare to re-issue. Luther's last sermon was a fierce, unbridled attack on the Jews, whose expulsion from Eisleben he vociferously demanded. He died at Eisleben four days after that expression of hatred, on February 18th, 1546.

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Father Doctor Leslie Rumble, M.S.C. and his radio audience had the following reaction to Mr Todd's research on Martin Luther.

Q. I have read a book, "*Martin Luther*," by John M. Todd, which the publishers say will help to uproot lingering prejudices that prevent many Catholics from seeing Luther plainly for what he was, a man totally committed to Christ and intensely concerned for His Church.

A. Mr. Todd is a Catholic layman with a not always prudent enthusiasm for the reunion movement. In April, 1964, the Catholic Archbishop Garner, of Pretoria, South Africa, said that he welcomed ecumenism as a "God-inspired movement towards better understanding, closer association and 'in God's good time' the visible reunion of Christendom." But he added: "So far, around the world, the ecumenical movement has been dogged by muddleheadedness, bursting with goodwill, but confused to an exasperating degree. Catholics can well be excused for asking what is happening." Those words would not be without some application to Mr. John M. Todd. In 1955, he published a book entitled "*Catholicism and the Ecumenical Movement*," of which the London "*Times Literary Supplement*," after noting the Abbot of Downside's misgivings in the introduction lest readers should find in it a watered-down version of Catholicism, said: "Books like this can only exasperate minds that are aware of the magnitude of the problem." That at least suggests caution in one's approach to a book on Martin Luther by Mr. Todd.

Q. The Swiss theologian Dr. Hans Kung, commending the book, said: "He who would understand the modern Catholic Church must

understand the Reformation. He who would understand the Reformation, must understand Luther."

A. Whatever be the truth of Dr. Hans Kung's remarks, he knew enough to realise that Mr. Todd's book could not lead to a genuine understanding of Luther and should have said so. It has been said that the Luther of the violent, abusive and scurrilous writings that came from his pen was not the whole Luther, and that he was after all an earnest religious reformer. But the reverse is also true. Earnest religious reformer as he was bent on being in his own way, he was yet the Luther of the violent, abusive and scurrilous writings. It is one thing for Catholic scholars to admit that Luther was not wholly without virtues, even as Protestant scholars admit that he was not wholly without faults; but it is too much to be told by publishers that their book will enable us to "see Luther plainly for what he was, a man totally committed to Christ." Martin Luther was far too self-centred for that.

The Methodist Dr. Gordon Rupp, an acknowledged authority on Luther, says in his book *"The Righteousness of God"* that Luther had two violent hatreds, that of those he called "the apostate Jews," and that of what he called "apostate Catholicism." Luther, he writes, believed "the papacy was toppling to its doom;" and he quotes Luther as saying: "Living, I was your plague; dying, I shall be your death, O Pope." Not to see such aspects of Luther is scarcely to understand Luther. However, as Pope John XXIII said: "We do not want to put anyone in past history on trial. Responsibility is divided. Let us come together and make an end of our divisions." Luther's teachings, variously interpreted, contributed towards that fragmentation of Christendom which to a great extent now constitutes the ecumenical problem which we can only hope and pray with God's help to solve. But we won't make progress by refusing to face facts and by leaning over backwards, unrealistically pretending to ourselves that Luther was a man "totally committed to Christ and intensely concerned for His Church." He was too wrapped up in Martin Luther for that.

Q. What would that great convert Arnold Lunn's opinion be of Luther and of the ecumenical movement today?

A. Arnold Lunn, who is still convinced that Luther's personal defects of character are impossible to defend, would agree that in God's providence he did, by his revolt against the Catholic Church, shock Catholics from the godless humanism of the Renaissance period into taking personal religion seriously instead of yielding too much to intellectual wrangling, institutional politics, and merely lip-service in the Christianity they professed. The Council of Trent, in 25 Sessions held during 18 years from 1545 to 1563, inaugurated the "Counter-Reformation" within the Catholic Church itself. The English Cardinal Pole told the Council that the only way to meet the challenge of the Protestant Reformation was, not by conflict, but for Catholics to reform themselves. Admitting this, Arnold Lunn certainly still holds, as all Catholics do, that Luther went too far in declaring reason itself, ecclesiastical authority, Sacraments in the Catholic sense of the word, and "good works" to be useless. But Arnold Lunn cannot be accused of being anti-ecumenical. With the permission of the late Cardinal Griffin of Westminster, he created something of a sensation by preaching in an Anglican church in London, the Anglican Vicar having invited him to do so because he had never written anything, the Vicar said, which was uncharitable towards Anglicans. Lunn has said that he sees no possibility of the complete reunion in fact of all professing Christians - a judgment anyone is entitled to make; but he writes: "I am, however, tremendously keen for the utmost possible co-operation between ourselves and other Christian bodies in defence of basic Christian values, including Christian morality."