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LUTHER AND THE PRINCE

by

WALTER H. ROSCHKE

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INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF SUBJECT

Martin Luther is one of the giants of history. To examine fully his contributions to the Church would require a lifetime. And so there have been historians totally dedicated to the study of the life of Luther and to the Reformation. Certainly no period of German history has been more¹ diligently studied than this period of the Reformation. More than a dozen editions of the works of Luther have been published. Presently still another edition is being translated and put into book form for the English-speaking people² of the world to read and enjoy. More than three thousand biographies and treatises about the life of Luther have been³ written, and the number continues to grow.

The voluminous material available on Luther and his work presents a very real problem to the Reformation scholar. Surely no one would attempt a study of the Reformation without giving careful consideration to Martin Luther, its first outstanding leader. But to select materials for such a consideration becomes extremely difficult. To read all the works published by and about Luther would be impossible. And yet the thorough scholar cannot afford to overlook

1 E.G.Schwiebert, Luther and His Times, (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p.1.

2 This new American Edition is a joint venture of Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press. It will be a fifty-five volume set and is scheduled for publication over a period of fifteen years. It is presently about half completed.

3 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.2.

something that may be vital to his understanding of Luther. The problem, then, in dealing with Luther and the Reformation is not where to find enough material, but rather where to draw the line in choosing the material.

Why has there been such a vast amount of writing devoted to Luther? A hasty response would be something like this, "He was the founder of the Lutheran Church," or "He broke away from the Catholic Church and started Protestantism." Such statements are essentially true. But there is much more to it than that. Luther was not concerned with founding a Lutheran Church nor with breaking from Rome. He was concerned with getting the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ out to the people. The Medieval Church restricted man in his efforts to reach God, and Luther wanted to do away with any restrictions between man and his Savior. Luther was instrumental in reforming the Church, in restoring man to his rightful position as a "priest" in God's eyes. Such a contribution can never be underestimated in the history of the Church or of the world.

And there was more, too, that has made Luther so well-remembered. He showed forth "...a kind of individualism which was to characterize Protestantism, that of the naked soul face to face with God, redeemed by Him, and, responsible to Him, convinced that without disloyalty to Him it cannot submit to other authority unless convinced by reason

and the Scriptures."¹ Protestants, then, can see in Luther the champion of that strength of character and belief that has made Christianity such a tremendous force in the world.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

However, it would be wrong to think of Luther as being the only influential force in the Reformation. Many other people and forces enter into the total scene. That God was with Luther cannot be denied. And, yet, it is also true that God uses the people and things of the world to advance His plans. Luther was not working alone, guided and protected solely by God. Other forces came to bear upon him. It will be the aim of this thesis to point out the importance of one such influence in the life of Luther, that of the prince. What was the connection between the Reformation and the government in Germany? Could Luther have succeeded without the prince?

It is also hoped that some form of selective assistance will, hereby, be afforded the Reformation scholar, so that anyone interested in the problems of Church and government relations would not have to examine every work written on the subject but might find some help here. It is an attempt to examine and arrange more precisely some of the Reformation material.

¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1953), p.741.

METHOD OF TREATMENT AND ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM

Because a man, or an event, cannot be understood fully apart from those people and events which surround him, a section of introductory material is devoted to a brief discussion of medieval times. Within this section some picture of the Church in society will be framed. The Church was the most important factor in the lives of the people, and Luther was a product of that Church. To skip over its importance to society would be to omit an integral part of Luther's life. The Church touched every detail of the public and¹ private life of the people.

The economic situation in Europe and in Germany also plays into the Reformation background. The people were not wealthy. They lived a rather menial life, except for the exceptional group of well-to-do Church officials and nobles, and this caused the people to be careful with their possessions. A man such as Luther, who spoke out to keep German wealth for the Germans, was bound to receive the support of Germany and its princely rulers.

Directly related to the above was the growth of national states. The loyalty of the people was being directed to a state and its ruler, one that could boastfully be called its own. The people of Spain, France, and England were experiencing this already at the time of Luther. The opening

¹ Ida Walz Blayney, The Age of Luther (New York, Vantage Press, 1957), p.3.

up of the New World had started them on explorations for profit and for the glory of the homeland. Germany was still greatly divided and enjoyed none of the exploratory ventures. Yet the feeling of its people for a German cause was rapidly rising. Into this picture stepped Luther, and the people cheered him on.

Attention also must be devoted to the religious and political situations as they were peculiar to Germany. Since the text is primarily concerned with the Lutheran Reformation, the conditions in Germany must be primary in any discussion of religion and politics in Europe.

No work on Luther would be complete without a look at his own thinking and writing. An effort will be made to keep this at a minimum and spread throughout the paper, as the main thrust is not toward an examination of Luther's ideas but of his relationship with the people and rulers of Germany. Specifically his views on the state and the Church must be examined briefly. Could he accept aid from the prince? Would God use a temporal ruler to advance His spiritual realm? These are questions Luther must have faced. Then, too, some of the views of Luther on doctrinal matters cannot be overlooked without omitting an important part of the man. If his insistence on pure doctrine had not been so strong, he would not have needed so much help.

Finally, the heart of the project itself, the specific assistance offered Luther by the various rulers of the German

states will be examined. In his early career no one was more interested and helpful than Frederick, Elector of Saxony. His protection of Luther, professor of his beloved university, was certainly extraordinary.¹ Frederick would allow no one, not even the pope, to drag out of Germany a man Frederick felt deserved the protection of his ruler.

The materials having to do with assistance given Luther by the rulers will be kept, as much as possible, within a chronological pattern, so that the progression of things can be noted. For as the Reformation advanced, the cause of Luther received more and more attention throughout all Europe, and more and more people became involved. Already by 1522 there was widespread sentiment behind Luther, so that it was almost a national movement at that early date.² By the time Luther died the Reformation had reached such proportions that it could not be stopped. Much of this growth and fervor was afforded by the political rulers themselves. The League of Torgau is evidence of the strong feeling of the rulers toward what they thought was a right expression of the religion of Jesus Christ. That the movement depended upon such princely support will be the main argument of the paper.

SOURCES

As was mentioned above the works of Luther himself must

¹ Luther was professor at Wittenberg University from 1511, and Wittenberg remained his home till his death.

² Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation, ed. Rev. B.J. Kidd (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1911), p.106.

be a part of the source material. Those which have been most helpful are his letters to important people and his writings on the sacraments.

General Church history works have been consulted heavily, primarily for the purpose of determining the atmosphere of the Middle Ages. Here much help was found about the social and economic conditions influential in the Reformation.

Specific works on the Reformation and on Luther, of course, supply the bulk of the source material. They can be expected to direct themselves most pointedly to the problem expressed in the paper. One particular book bears mention here, that of Kidd's Documents of the Reformation. It contains many letters that show the feelings of important personalities of the Reformation. Several articles in the periodical Church History have also been consulted.

CHAPTER I

DISCUSSION OF MEDIEVAL TIMES

The Church of the Middle Ages was the center of society. Apart from the Church there was little of value to the people. It controlled what education there was for the people and determined, for the main part, who would partake of the education. The Church had its own courts, where it could try its clergy, and no secular court could alter the decision of the ecclesiastical courts.

The legal setup of the Church extended beyond its own clergy, however, and reached into the lives of everyone. Schwiebert says,

The Church claimed the right to try all cases involving marriage, legitimacy, separation, dowries, last wills and testaments. Even contracts made under oath were considered to be under the jurisdiction of the church courts. ¹

Such control of the Church exerted itself in every phase of the people's life. The Church took care of the sick and the needy, as there were no governmental organizations to handle such jobs. The Church taxed the people for the support of itself, and it made it a crime for anyone to speak against the Church. Anyone who disagreed with the Church was condemned a heretic and was turned over to the civil authorities to be punished.

Much of the Church's control over the people came as a direct result of its teachings on salvation. To the ordinary

¹ Op. cit., p.19.

person of the Middle Ages religion was looked upon as a road to life after death. The way to get on this road was through the Church. Outside of the Church there was no way to heaven. The reason for this was that the priests held, in their private possession, the sacraments. The sacraments were the means God had given His people to purify themselves and make them members of the Church. To assure themselves of salvation the Christians had to attend mass, they had to confess their sins to the priest, and they had to partake of the Lord's Supper.¹ Since the priests had control of the sacraments and the other churchly functions, the people either did what the Church told them, or they resigned themselves to hell.

The general economic situation in the Medieval period offered the people little more freedom than did the religious. The high standard of living which most of us enjoy today was unknown in Luther's times. People rarely moved from job to job but carried on in the business or trade of the family. For most of the people of Europe this meant farming. It was not farming on a large scale, aimed at world markets, but it was a matter of providing for ones own needs.

The decline of feudalism and the growth of towns helped to solve some of the economic difficulties of the period, but even the townsfolk were far from well-off. The big change from poverty to riches has been the story only of

1 Blayney, op. cit., p.137.

the times since 1600.¹ The cost of living during the Reformation period went up, as it usually does, but the wages did not go up with the rise. The wages of the common man were uncommonly low, those of the professional and skilled classes somewhat better, and those of the government officials terribly high.² This fact of the wages, together with the tremendous wealth of the Church, made the life of the common man anything but glamorous.

The social situation, then, was one of unrest. And if the bad economy was not enough for the people, the government inflicted all sorts of laws upon the people and tried to regulate every phase of their life. As Smith says,

This even extended to the fashion of his clothes, the number of courses at his meals, how many guests he might have at a wedding, dinner, or dance, how long he should be permitted to haunt the tavern, and how much he should drink, how he should spend Sunday, how he should become engaged, how dance, how part his hair and with how thick a stick he should be indulged in the luxury of beating his wife.³

People who held positions of authority, either in the government or in the Church, were given a higher place of respect in the community than were the rest of the people. The collapse of feudalism had done away with the strict separation between nobles and serfs, but the idea of a high and low class still existed. Those who had land, or had

1 Preserved Smith, The Age of the Reformation (New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1920), p.459.

2 Ibid., p.469.

3 Ibid., p.483.

friends in the right places, or managed to gain some military power were the members of the privileged class. Next to them stood the clergy, who also were holders of land and of considerable wealth. Both of these groups were treated better, in every respect, than were the rest of the people, the majority of Europe's population.

Most of the daily life of the people centered around their work. For the people in the country this meant a long hard day in the fields and taking care of what few animals they had. Their board consisted mainly of grain and a little meat, washed down with much cheap ale or beer.¹ The townspeople were not much better off, although they did have a few more distractions. Chief among these was the fair. At the fair would be assembled people from all over the area, each with his own particular product for trade. There were also various forms of amusements at the fair to brighten the otherwise drab life of the people. Gradually these fairs became ways of becoming acquainted with other parts of the land, for merchants from neighboring towns would bring their goods and news to trade. In general the life of the people was nothing spectacular. Unless they had a title, or position in the Church, or land and wealth, they lived a pretty routine existence.

An evident development in the Reformation period was the growth of new national powers, the emergence of national

¹ Ibid., p.497.

states. The decline of feudalism and the collapse of the manor system helped to hasten this appearance of nations.¹ The noble who gained for himself the most friends or power gradually became head over a large territory. This process of nationalizing was best seen in the country of Spain. There the people had long had a common enemy, the Moors, and that helped bind them together. They also were beginning to enjoy the fruits of overseas wealth. Then, too, the joining of Aragon and Castile, through the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, gave Spain the territorial strength it needed² to be a nation. Another cause for the rise of nations was the desire of the new merchant class for better protection. A king offered them the best means to safety in their travels over land or sea, as a central governmental ruler could control a greater portion of land and a greater number of people. The rising middle class, then, gave support to the development of the monarchy of the period.

The effect of this new political growth on the people and on the Church was enormous. The people were no longer restricted to a tiny portion of the earth's surface, but they had a state to consider now. They found themselves bound together by common cultures and common enemies. New national languages and literatures were becoming prevalent.

1 Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p.285.

2 Ibid., p.286.

The common enemies were, of course, all those outside the state, those who threatened the people's common unity.¹

The Church also felt the pressure of these new nations. The kings naturally wanted to gain control of everything in their land, and this included the Church, with its large holdings of land and its rights to collect money from the people.

The increased power of the kings curbed the dominion of the pope by slowly depriving the universal Church of her governmental functions. On the eve of the Reformation the rising national states were demanding control of the church government.²

This desire of the nation to rid itself of outside influences, particularly the Church, will be seen more clearly and fully in the section on Germany's political situation on Reformation eve.

It was into this Medieval scene that Martin Luther made his appearance. That he was able to shake off the strict hold that society held upon everyone in Europe was evidence of his genius. That he accomplished so much for the spreading of the true Gospel in the world was evidence of God's helping him. That he was able to promote such an unthinkable Medieval project as a Reformation of the Church was, it shall be shown, evidence of the support given him by the ruling princes of Germany.

¹ Lars P. Qualben, A History of the Christian Church (New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1958), p.205.

² Ibid., p.209.

CHAPTER II

THE GERMAN SITUATION

The situation in Germany at the time of Luther was quite different from that in any other country at his time. In fact it is difficult even to speak of Germany as a "country." The territory itself was made up of some three hundred separate states and free cities, each of which had its own ruler and was independent of the others. Because of the peculiarities that existed in Germany, and because that was the territory in which Luther lived and started the Reformation, special attention must be given to the Germany of Luther's day.

In spite of anything else that can be said one cannot get away from the fact that it was a religious age. Fife says, "Late medieval schools and universities were steeped in the religious spirit, and every move in the life of schoolboy and youth was surrounded with religious sanctions and ceremonies."¹ This is not to say it was an evangelical or pietistic period. Much of the religious emphasis went no further than the sanctions and ceremonies. As Qualben so adequately states it in his Church history text, much of the piety of the age was "turned outward."² The people were eager to build and decorate churches. Each town was interested in having the most beautiful and elaborate church in the area. There was a

¹ Robert H. Fife, The Revolt of Martin Luther (New York, Columbia University Press, 1957), p.69.

² Op. cit., p.212.

certain revival of preaching that accompanied the church building, but it was not accompanied by much Gospel. Emphasis in the church service seemed to be placed on the ceremonial that surrounded the preaching.

Religious institutions received numerous gifts during the period, and many of them became extremely wealthy. These institutions, such as monasteries or the churches themselves, also served as the centers for religious activities in the area. Since the religious activities were the major, and in many cases the only, activities the people had, the people had little opportunity to become interested in anything other than religious activities.

Much interest was shown in religious orders, not only the monasteries but also orders for laymen. Fife states, "Martin's boyhood saw a rapid increase in the brotherhoods of laymen devoted to the cult of an especial saint."¹ Qualben adds, "In Germany every seventeenth person belonged to some religious order."²

Pilgrimages, too, were popular. In many cases these were to nearby towns and shrines, but it was not uncommon for people to walk to Rome. They made such trips to gain forgiveness of sins.

Closely related to this trust in the value of pilgrimages was the belief in the miraculous power of relics. The relics could be of any saint of the Church, but those of the

1 Op. cit., p.13.

2 Op. cit., p. 213.

Apostles and of Christ were deemed most valuable.

Belief in evil spirits and witches was also common. People blamed evil spirits for crop failure, sickness, and even death in a family. Fife says, "Crude superstition and naïve religious beliefs were intertwined to make up the texture of the mind."¹ The remains of pagan mythology were still evident, having survived from primitive days among the German people. Christianity, as strong as it was, had not done away with all the primitive pagan influence.

The superstition of the people, together with fear, filled the religious mind of the age. People worried about Satan, Judgement Day, purgatory, hell, etc., and they looked to the Church to find answers to their fears, to see how they could avoid hell and gain salvation. The Church's answer, according to Qualben, was composed of the following parts:

(1) Forgiveness was only possible in the Church and was given only by the priest. The idea had long been prevalent that there was no salvation outside the Church;

(2) Amulets etc. could be purchased by the people for protection against evil spirits. Prayers to the saints were also helpful in warding off troubles;

(3) The sacraments were necessary to salvation. Their ultimate control was in the hands of the pope, and he could withhold them through excommunication and interdict;

¹ Op. cit., p.10.

Preserved Smith says, concerning the necessity of the sacraments,

Without these rites there was no salvation, and they acted automatically (ex opere operato) on the soul of the faithful who put no active hindrance in their way. Save baptism, they could be administered only by priests. ...Needless to remark the immense power this doctrine gave the clergy in a believing age. They were made the arbiters of each man's eternal destiny. ¹

(4) Confession had to be made to a priest before absolution could be received;

(5) Any punishments not taken care of in this life would be carried over into purgatory;

(6) The purchase of indulgences could lighten or remit punishment for sins of the living and for those of people in purgatory;

(7) Great emphasis was placed on good works. ²

The strict control which the Church exercised in all the above categories gave it a rather firm grip on the lives of the people in Germany. But that was not the end of the Church's superior position. It also exercised strong temporal powers. By this time the Church was, to all intents and purposes, an international state. ³ The Church had its own courts and prisons, its own laws, and it even passed death sentences. It controlled territories and was supported by taxes and involuntary contributions.

Perhaps the great wealth of the Church during the time

¹ Op. cit., p.27.

² Qualben, op. cit., p.201.

³ Smith, op. cit., p.29.

was as much a contributory cause to the Reformation as was anything else. Smith is of the opinion that the religious abuses of the Church were not the main ones, but rather that the money abuse was more important. "The wealth of the Church was enormous, though exaggerated by those contemporaries who estimated it at one-third of the total estate of Western Europe."¹ The Church collected a great deal of money in tithes, taxes, revenues from the land it owned, and the sale of indulgences. The clergy themselves were charged dues to the curia (also the annates for high ecclesiastical offices), and they, in turn, helped offset this by charging high fees for their services to the common people.

The more important religious institutions had great wealth in the form of textiles and of gold and silver vessels, many of which were given in the form of bequests by wealthy nobles. No gift taxes had to be paid on any such gifts left the Church or other religious institutions, so the Church profited in this way also. Then, too, the clerical industry and commerce did not have to pay the taxes that the private merchants had to pay.

Public festivals were the occasion for colorful procession through the streets of the towns, and, "On such occasions," Fife says, "the university in academic dress, professors, masters, and students demonstrated the fealty² of the academic world to the clerical." So even on the

1 Ibid., p.21.

2 Op. cit., p.70.

intellectual level there was a great difference between the Church and the state in regard to the matter of wealth.

Singling out the city of Eisenach Fife has this to say,

As the Middle Ages drew to a close and the Eisenach princes turned their patronage from letters to religious foundations, the ecclesiastical burden lay heavy on the city, which at the time of Martin's coming offered a picture of economic stagnation and decay. Only the Churches and cloisters flourished. 1

The cloisters played a big role in the German Reformation. Mention has already been made of the great number of lay-brotherhoods that had arisen in the Middle Ages. The clerical monasteries were also vital to the thought of Germany, for these were the centers of learning. However, the men in the monasteries were beginning to be dissatisfied with the strict control over thought which the Church exercised. As Gerhard Ritter states in his Luther, His Life and Work,

It is interesting - and yet by no means a matter of pure chance - that it was precisely in the German mendicant monasteries, those seats of lofty devotion and learned contemplation, that German sensibility and thought came into conflict with the spirit of Roman dogma and first broke through the hard shell of pious obedience to find its own means of expression. 2

Ritter goes on to say,

It would certainly be a mistake to see these men as in any sense early reformers - none of them broke through the magic circle of the medieval, hierarchical world-order. But one can see clearly in these isolated attempts at self-expression how a strong spiritual need common to them all struggles to be heard. 3

1 Ibid., p.25.

2 Gerhard Ritter, Luther, His Life and Work (New York, Harper & Row, 1963), p.19.

3 Ibid., p.20.

Of course all the criticism of monastic thought did not come from the monks. Many of the humanistic intellectuals who were becoming characteristic of the age also looked upon the medieval thought system as outmoded and unimaginative. Smith says, regarding this situation,

The ideal of the Church was monastic; all the pleasure of this world, all its pomps and learning and art were but snares to seduce men from salvation.... All this grated harshly on the minds of the generations that began to find life glorious and happy, not evil but good. ¹

The political situation in Germany was quite complicated and cannot be considered thoroughly in a short dissertation. Basically, as was said earlier, Germany was a divided territory. By the end of the fifteenth century there was no real unity. The Holy Roman Empire asserted great claims, but, actually, it was, as Smith says, "...but a loose confederacy of many and diverse territories."² The emperor himself was not especially strong. He only had power as it was allowed him by the electors and princes. At the Imperial Diets the electors and princes had the deciding votes. The emperor could not force his views on the Diet.³ At one time Maximilian I (1493-1519) tried to unite the German states, but he got no support from the electors, who did not want to see his authority increase.⁴

¹ Op. cit., p.28.

² Ibid., p.74.

³ Luther Hess Waring, The Political Theories of Martin Luther (New York, G.P.Putnam's Sons, 1910), p.35.

⁴ Qualben, op. cit., p.207.

The Imperial Diet was the determining factor in the political affairs of Germany. It was made up of the electors, princes, and representatives from the cities. In the final analysis only the first two groups had any authority.

Much of the high position of the electors can be traced¹ back to the Golden Bull of 1356. In this Bull, still affecting Germany at the start of the sixteenth century, were listed the privileges belonging to the various electors. Some of these privileges were: (1) The electors had "virtually sovereign rights in their respective territories, and these territories could not be subdivided or alienated";² (2) An act of conspiracy against these men was treason and was punished by death. The conspirator's property was also taken; (3) The electors had the privileges of privilegium de non evocando, which stated that his subjects could only be tried in his courts and could not be taken to others, and of privilegium de non appellando, which prevented appeal³ from the elector's court to that of the emperor. The electors did not fail to make the fullest use of this long-standing document to maintain their authority.

Besides the Imperial Diet there also existed the Landtage, which was the territorial diet. Here the respective

1 The Golden Bull was issued under the reign of Charles IV and contained the method for electing the Holy Roman Emperor.

2 Waring, op. cit., p.36.

3 Ibid., p.36.

prince ruled over the meeting, so the prince was fairly well supreme in his territory, just as the elector was in his.¹

Along with the political control that was exercised by the German princes was a certain amount of religious control. The princes managed to gain the right, over a period of time, of patronage to church benefices, and they would not let any bulls be published or indulgences sold without their expressed permission. The Free Cities acted much the same way. As Smith says, "The authority of the German states over their own spiritualities was no innovation of the heresy of Wittenberg."² It was also in these territories, rather than in the empire as a whole, that a beginning was made for a national church, such as that which existed in Germany after Luther had broken the bondage of Rome.³ In spite of the many separate states within Germany there was a certain feeling of oneness resulting from a common language. And in none of the points on which the German people could find agreement were they more agreed than on their opposition to the rule of the Italian Curia.⁴

A good example of this princely concern with the religious conditions in their territories was shown in the

1 Ibid., p.39.

2 Smith, op. cit., p.44.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

Gravamina, lists of grievances that were presented at each Diet. These were drawn up by the princes and presented to the emperor. Some samples will serve to illustrate the point. In 1457 the German prince-bishops refused to let the clergy of the land be taxed for a crusade. In 1461 the princes disapproved of indulgence sales. They also opposed usury by the priests and the immorality of the clergy. In 1479 the princes voiced their opposition to the Mendicant Orders and to the appointment of foreigners to church offices. They wanted a new reform council, and they voted against appeals to Rome by clergy who were guilty of crimes against German laws. At the Diet of 1502 the princes were able to see some positive results from their complaints. The money gained from the sale of indulgences was not to go to Rome but was to be used for the defense of the German people against the Turks.¹

This princely opposition to the abuses of the Roman Church was not limited to the ruling class. Such words as "Papal appointees were rather fitted to be drivers of mules than pastors of souls," found strong support among the common people.²

Preserved Smith says, "The Reformation, like most other revolutions, came not at the lowest ebb of abuse, but at a time when the tide had already begun to run, and to run

¹ Ibid., pp.45-46.

² Ibid., p.46.

strongly, in the direction of improvement."¹ The desire for reform of some sort was not limited to any one person or group but could be seen growing up in many people. This desire was evidenced by the widespread popularity of the Bible and other devotional literature. It was also evidenced by the formation of the lay-brotherhoods, whose purpose it was to develop a good life in this world and to perform social service.

The evangelical faith which was spreading among the simple, pious, medieval Christian was also evidence of a stirring spirit in the age. Mysticism, with its approach to God through visions and emotions, made the priest unnecessary, and in this way it helped pave the way for the Reformation. Qualben says,

The intensely religious devotion acted as a wholesome check on the prevailing religious formalism and officialism. The genuine sorrow of the Mystics for the decay of the Church spread to the masses, and this sentiment led to the longing for a reformation. 2

Another thing that added to the unrest of the period was the introduction of Roman law. This recognized little of the peasants' rights under the old German Christian law.³ Before this introduction each class of people (including peasants) was tried by a jury of peers out in the open,

¹ Ibid., p. 26.

² Op. cit., p. 216.

³ Waring, op. cit., p. 53.

and everyone got along fairly well in life. Under the new law this procedure was changed. The old Roman Empire had recognized only masters and slaves. It had nothing like the free tenants or peasants of Germany, and so the situation became bad. Latin developed as the legal language, and so lawyers were needed, everything had to be written. "The German prince or ruler was to be a princeps, in the ancient Roman sense."¹ His will determined all legislation and administration.

In practically every situation the life of the German peasants was nothing outstanding. The culture that there was in Germany in the latter part of the fifteenth century was "strictly an urban culture."² Anything to be found in the way of art, literature, scholarship, and comforts of life was to be found within the walls of the cities. Fife says these towns "...were strung out across the land in a network of industrial centers whose activities and wealth had a generation earlier awakened the admiration of foreign observers."³

Life in the town was greatly different from that outside. The people in the towns generally viewed the peasants with contempt. This was the environment into which Martin Luther was born, and Fife says that Luther probably acquired the

1 Ibid., p.55.

2 Fife, op. cit., p.7.

3 Ibid.

prejudice of the townsfolk, so that later on he did not¹ understand much of their problem.

The serfs and peasants who worked the land were subject to the owners and hardly made enough during the year to stay alive. They had no freedoms to cut down trees, hunt, or fish on the land they worked.² Actually, the poor were not restricted to the country. Even though there was considerable wealth associated with the towns, a great separation was developing in the towns, too, between the rich and the poor. As trade increased a new class of merchants³ arose, and this class possessed much of the wealth.

The poor of the town and the country asked for betterment of condition, but they were ignored. The result was a growing discontent and even restlessness among the lower⁴ classes. The civil taxes were high, and added to all this were all the demands of the Church. Money for the papal treasury, tithes, and payment for the performance of priestly services were extracted from everyone. The unrest became so strong in some cases that several actual revolts broke out in northern Europe before the Reformation. The cry of the people leading these revolts was, "Down with the priests and down with the lords."⁵

1 Ibid.

2 Qualben, op. cit., p.211.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

Adding to the problems of the poor were several new developments of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. There occurred during this time quite a few crop failures. There was also the development of domestic and foreign commerce. The discovery of America and the gold that came with it, together with the rich trade developing with the East Indies, contributed to a steady increase in the cost of living for the people. The big problem was that the laborer received little or no pay increase to compensate¹ for this rise in living costs.

Another feature of medieval Europe that was helping to shape the German situation was the Renaissance. The Renaissance had affected practically every phase of medieval life, and it is certainly true that it aroused a new religious consciousness among the people.² In Italy the Renaissance was quite different from what it was in Germany. In Italy it was mostly pagan, but in Germany it was essentially Christian. In fact it can be said that the Renaissance and³ Reformation in Germany can hardly be distinguished. Ida Walz Blayney says, concerning this distinctive quality of the German Renaissance,

Yet whereas the Italian Renaissance was in the main identified with the secularization of life, the German Renaissance and its humanism, true to the traditional

1 Waring, op. cit., p. 49.

2 Qualben, op. cit., p.199.

3 Ibid., p.204.

interest in religion and theology, engaged in the critical examination of contemporary church lore and probed the import of Christianity in its original form. ¹

By the sixteenth century there were scholars in Germany who devoted their whole time to the study of Greek and Hebrew, and this "laid a basis for the humanistic biblical studies which were to advance the Reformation."² The thought and scholarship in Germany never went completely secular. And so it was in Germany that the people demanded reform in the Church far more insistently than did the people in the other Renaissance countries.

In his discussion of the religious conditions of Luther's Germany Qualben lists five ways in which German humanism had paved the way for a general religious crisis and reform:

(1) By exposing the abuses of the Church and the work-righteousness; (2) By claiming the Bible as the only form of faith, and by placing the Bible into the hands of the people; (3) By undermining and refuting the method and the theology of Scholasticism; (4) By placing a greater emphasis on real, practical Christianity; and (5) By strengthening the national anti-papal party.³ Humanism found this quarrel with the Church because of the general character of the theology of the time. The official church had gotten lost in the "dogmatic,

¹ Op. cit., p.52.

² Ibid.

³ Op. cit., p.199.

restrictive, and pedantic scheme of Scholasticism, which position caused the great conflict with the modern scientific spirit of inquiry and reason."¹ The humanists, through their study of the early sources, saw the great contrast between the early Church and that of their own day, and they openly criticized the corruption.

A group that helped show the German discontent with the religious situation of medieval times and also influenced the development of humanism in Germany was the Brethren of the Common Life. This was a lay movement that was concerned with "the personal assurance of redemption experienced in direct communion with God."² The followers of this movement were widely scattered, but they lived their religion. Even though the Church had forbidden the use of Scripture by the common people, this group promoted the translation of the Bible so everyone could read it.

An individual example of the humanistic expression being found among the German people is that of Ulrich von Hutten. Von Hutten was a German Knight and also a humanist. Blayney says of Hutten, that "His battle had to do with Rome, with the Roman Church, with its legalism, its exploitations, oppressions, with all Roman forces active in reducing Germany to abject bondage."³

1 Ibid., p.210.

2 Blayney, op. cit., p.54.

3 Ibid., p.58.

Another Church practice that was coming in for its share of criticism was that of saint worship. Previously people had regarded the worship of saints as a help to a better life, but gradually it was being thought of more as a stumbling block. The people of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were certainly not advanced enough scientifically to view all miracles as regular occurrences of natural law, but they were beginning to look upon the worship of saints as being a form of polytheism, and so the whole idea was displeasing to them.¹ The people actually made things worse in this matter by abusing the worship of saints. They prayed for help for all kinds of things, even those which were illegal. The traffic in relics, which was greatly enhanced by the importance attached to saints, was becoming ridiculous.

The enlightenment period in German thought found still another area in which to voice its disapproval, and that was in connection with the great distinction that had grown up between clergy and laity. As was mentioned above this distinction had arisen primarily out of the necessity of the sacraments. But such a distinction was becoming increasingly unpopular and intolerable to "the growing self-expression and enlightenment of a nascent individualism."²

In connection with the German situation notice must be

1 Smith, op. cit., p.29.

2 Ibid., p.28.

taken of the German character. Trying to describe this peculiar German character Ritter says,

All that we can grasp is the historical destiny of the German nation, as it is shown in the clear light of its past: that as a people set in the centre of Europe, the Germans were to be more strongly opposed than others to the infiltration of foreign influences into their culture. ¹

He goes on to say that it was only in Germany that the deep spiritual failings of the Church caused a conflict to develop between itself and the growing religious needs of the people, "that Christian piety in its most intense form." ²

Ritter concludes by saying that because of this German feeling, "Luther's life-work might well appear as the final crowning point of a development which had started centuries before." ³

Schwiebert also expresses this feeling that Luther was not the first or the only German intent upon reform. He says that,

...the German Reformation must be regarded as a very involved movement, the work of not only Martin Luther and a few fellow professors, but of an army of people, some 22,000 students, priests, monks, and laymen carrying the Gospel message to the German people. ⁴

Schwiebert also says that Luther, in wrestling with the problem of salvation, was not dealing with a problem that was peculiar to him,

1 Op. cit., pp.17-18.

2 Ibid., p.21.

3 Ibid.

4 Op. cit., p.3.

...but that of the whole Germanic mind. Reinhold Seeburg says that the gulf between the Germanic and Latin minds was never bridged by medieval theology. The German had always regarded religion as a personal and individual experience. The idea of the mystical body of Christ embodied only in the Roman Church and the hierarchy always seemed foreign to Teutonic thought. ¹

The Germans felt they could go directly to God, and so they never came to understand fully the highly organized system of sacraments in the Roman Church. Apparently the Germans of Luther's day wanted a religion that would be more satisfying personally than the formal outward ceremonies of the Roman Church. Actually, the development of the idea of territorialism, making the religion of the prince that of the land, was a revolt against the idea of Rome as the head of the Church. As Schwiebert says, "In a sense Germany's choice was between the sacramental grace of Rome and Luther's ² priesthood of all believers."

Closely connected with Germany's dislike of the Roman plan of salvation was its dislike of Rome's taking away so much of Germany's money. Indulgences for the building of St. Peter's in Rome led to vast sums of money flowing to Rome from other countries in Europe, and Germany was not excluded. The civil rulers were unhappy about this, because they wanted the money for themselves to run their own affairs. The merchants were unhappy because it cut down on their profits. ³

1 Ibid., p.157.

2 Ibid.

3 Qualben, op. cit., p.212.

The Diet of Augsburg of 1518 gives a good example of German feeling against the papal taking of money from Germany to Rome. At the Diet Cajetan asked for money for a crusade against the Turks. A certain tax, ten percent for clergy and five percent for laity, on incomes was to be given. The Diet refused the request in no uncertain terms. The Diet stated that "the real enemy of Christianity was not the Turks but the hound of hell in Rome."¹ Therefore, as Smith says, "When such was the public opinion it is clear that Luther only touched a match to a heap of inflammable material. The whole nationalist movement redounded to the benefit of Protestantism."²

By 1500 there were really few limitations on the Church's power in Germany because no secular ruler was strong enough to stand up to the pope. The great bishops in Germany were wealthy rulers of territories, and these were practically independent. In spite of regular protests made at the Diets the papacy got much money out of Germany.³ The national feeling that was rising in resentment against the abuses of Rome in money matters and in matters of ecclesiastical control helped to make Germany "potentially the most likely scene of revolt against the Church in all of Christendom."⁴

1 Smith, op. cit., p.46.

2 Ibid., p.47.

3 E. Harris Harbison, The Age of Reformation (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1955), p.37.

4 Ibid.

In summing up the German situation at the coming of Luther there is a section in the work of Harbison that well describes the scene:

As a result of these (the numerous little states within Germany and the inability of any one individual to be a uniting leader) there were tensions in Germany more serious than in any other part of Europe as the century opened. The lot of the peasants was deteriorating in many districts because of a kind of feudal reaction, and there had been some serious peasant rebellions during the fifteenth century. The towns were rich but insecure, ready to grasp at any doctrine or scheme which promised law and order. A vague but palpable national sentiment had been growing among the educated classes for a century, fed on the enthusiasm of a few Humanists for the virtue of the early Germany as described by Tacitus. It was directed not so much against the Turks or the French as against the Roman Church. It could hardly look to the emperor for leadership, since his pretensions and responsibilities were supranational, but it was ready to concentrate upon any other figure who might fire the popular imagination as the defender of a prostrate Germany against the vultures of Rome. Germany was the tinder-box of Europe as the century opened. ¹

¹ Ibid., p.25.

CHAPTER III

LUTHER - HIS VIEWS

"Martin Luther...is one of the few men of whom it may be said that the history of the world was profoundly affected by his work."¹ Such is Williston Walker's view of the man who started the Reformation in Germany. None of the Reformation sources has been found to disagree with this statement. A brief look at Luther will help to underscore the statement and perhaps even strengthen it.

Luther was not an organizer nor a politician as so many of the Church leaders of his day were. Luther moved men not by force nor by fear but by the power of his profound religious faith.² He had an unshakable trust in God and a perfect confidence in salvation freely given by God. There was no necessity for the Church's sacramental system, hierarchy, and other outward forms. Luther did not speak to the German people as one who demanded their attention lest they be doomed to an eternity apart from God. He spoke to them as one who was sincerely concerned about their spiritual condition, as one who wanted them to have all the benefits of a just and gracious God. He wanted the people of Germany to understand God as a loving Father and not just as a righteous judge. Luther spoke to the German people as one who was intimately a part of them.³

1 Walker, op. cit., p.302.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

The religious revival that was moving through Germany was not simply a pious outward movement. As has been shown above it was a real concern for the salvation of souls. Of this feeling Luther was part. As Walker says, "Luther felt strongly that deep sense of sinfulness which was the ground¹ note of the religious revival of the age in Germany."

Certainly, therefore, Luther was not the only person of his day interested in reform. Nor was he the first to be worried over the abuses of the Church. But he was the one who seemed to touch the real problem, that of the way of salvation, and his work was effective, where others¹ had not been. Many attempts had been made at reform by trying to be just like the early Christian communities or by stressing the "literal meaning of isolated early Christian doctrines."² Luther alone got to the heart of the matter. He did not attempt to re-establish the life and doctrine of the early Church, "but to reveal the religious strength of the Christian tradition in a way which was closely related to the spirit of the earliest beginnings."³ He discovered in this "the oldest heritage in the Christian tradition,"⁴ namely, the holiness of God and His majesty. This was the central point, and it did not allow for the sufficiency of

1 Ibid., p.303.

2 Ritter, op. cit., p.43.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

men. It was "unconditional and unlimited" in the moral demands it made, and in spite of His position He loved the people and sent His Son to make forgiveness available to them.¹

Luther saw this main emphasis of the early Church as still available in the Church of his day, but it was basically hidden. He wanted to restore it to light, and so he was not trying to establish a new Church but only wanted to revive the old Church. Ritter says, "Luther never wanted to make the way clear for religious individualism, but only for God to work in the hearts of men."²

It is apparent, then, that in all he did Luther was motivated by a genuine concern for the eternal welfare of his people. There was in him none of the extreme radicalism of a Karlstadt, who contended that anything not commanded in Scripture must be forbidden; none of the reliance on force that cost Zwingli his life; none of the extremism of a Calvin that would allow Servetus to be burned at the stake and attempt to establish a "perfect" Christian community in a city like Geneva. Waring is quite correct when he says,

It must be admitted that, in spite of the ruggedness of his character, the brusqueness of his language, and the rigor of his opposition to the foe, he was by far the mildest and most tolerant of the great reformers of his century.³

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., p.49.

3 Op. cit., pp.252-253.

In his ideas about Church and state Luther was at the same time unique and medieval. He believed that the state existed by God's will and institution.¹ But he also believed it should act apart from the Church and not interfere in the realm of theology. The state's function is a peace-keeping one, and it has existed, with its right of the sword, since the beginning of time.²

All the world, said Luther, is divided into two classes, one all true believers and the other all unbelievers. Those who are believers (if the whole world were such) could get by without any government, because the love of God would rule their lives.³ The temporal power, or civil government, is given by God for the control and punishment of those who make up the worldly kingdom. Christ can rule alone, through the Spirit, without laws, but the worldly government maintains peace with the sword.⁴ So the Christians, even though they do not need the law, obey it out of love for those who do. In fact, a Christian may wield the sword himself, if he is called upon to do so to maintain peace or punish evildoers.

Luther believed both civil and Church governments were necessary in the world. Neither one is sufficient without

1 Cf. Romans 13:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:13-14.

2 Waring, op. cit., p.73.

3 Ibid., p.75.

4 Ibid., p.76.

the other, for as Waring states, if the civil government ruled alone, "there would be hypocrisy...for without the Holy Spirit in the heart none can be pious..."; and if the spiritual ruled alone, there would be all kinds of wickedness, "for the common world cannot accept or understand it."¹ Also, Luther did not completely separate the two powers from each other, for he believed both were part of the corpus Christianium.² However, Luther did sever, absolutely, the state from any origin from or dependence upon the Church.³ The Augsburg Confession gave the final distinction in this matter, setting forth the origin, nature, etc. of the state as distinct from the Church.

In accepting the existence of both powers in the world Luther did not believe they should be part of each other's realm. Particularly did he think the Church ought not to take over the function of the civil law court. The Church courts had jurisdiction over all ecclesiastical officials and members of the various Church orders, and it had been commonly accepted in Europe for centuries that the civil law courts could have nothing to do with such cases.⁴ However, Luther said the law covers everyone, clergy or otherwise, and so did away with what was termed "benefit of the

1 Ibid., p.77.

2 Harold J. Grimm, "Luther's Conception of Territorial and National Loyalty," Church History, XVII, 82.

3 Waring, op. cit., p.80.

4 Ibid., p.95.

clergy." To Luther only the state had the right to coercive authority.¹ He did not feel that a person's status in the Church should affect his status in the state. As Waring states, "The sovereignty of the state, in its accepted significance, implies the subjection under it of every individual within its borders."²

The Middle Ages accepted the idea of obedience to the powers that be (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2), but they interpreted "powers that be" as ecclesiastical, and the authority³ belonged, therefore, to the pope in the final analysis. Luther was the one who insisted that this obedience in civil and secular matters be given to the state. He felt it was Satan who would have the state meddle in the affairs of the Church, and it was Satan who made the pope meddle in temporal affairs.⁴ He wanted both authorities to remain in their own fields.

Luther's insistence that all people should always obey the government in power naturally appealed to the rulers⁵ in Germany. In his explanation to the Fourth Commandment Luther says, "God gives and preserves to us through civil government, as through parents, maintenance, house and

1 Ibid., p.96.

2 Ibid., p.98.

3 Ibid., p.100.

4 Ibid., p.247.

5 Grimm, op. cit., p.101.

home, protection and security..., " and so the people should¹ obey.

According to Luther the duty of the government is to promote and maintain public peace. He said that the prince "...must give consideration to his subjects, and really devote himself to it. This he does when he directs his every² thought to making himself useful and beneficial to them...." The ruler should deal with the people's needs as though they were his own. However, Luther also said that this concern the prince should have for his subjects was easy to acquire. It tended to~~spo~~ spoil the fun-filled life which the man would like to have as a prince, and so it was difficult to be³ both ruler and Christian at the same time.

In dealing with evildoers the government should deal justly, but it should deal. It was not to let evil go unpunished. In every way the prince should act in a Christian way to his people and to his God. He should subject himself to God's wisdom in everything.⁴ If the prince acts in this manner, then the people will follow him and obey him, for only if the ruler commands something "expressly or explicitly contrary to the Word of God" can the people dispute,

1 Waring, op. cit., p.101.

2 Martin Luther, Luther's Works, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, XLV (American Edition; Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1962), p.120.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p.126.

¹
oppose, or disobey.

Because of his high position in the world the ruler should not take his role lightly. He must govern carefully. In difficult cases he should seek the advice of his counselors. He should not leave the decision up to the counselors, for the ruler must maintain his authority, but he should give them each a hearing and then make his own decision. No one of them should be trusted above all ²else. Luther was insistent upon this idea, so that the civil authority would make its decisions apart from the ecclesiastical authority.

Upon many occasions Luther found himself being asked advice by the princes and government officials, and he freely ³gave it. When there was the choice of decision between bishop and civil authority, he never supported either one as being supreme but suggested they both talk over their problem together and try to solve their difficulties that way. In no case did he want to take the matter to Rome for judgement.

Much of what Luther told the rulers was concerned with their position in regard to the reform effort. He felt the external reforms of the Church were to be carried out by the "lords of this world." ⁴ He restrained the zeal of his

¹ Waring, op. cit., p.106.

² Luther, op. cit., p.121.

³ Gottfried Krodel, ed., Luther's Works, XLVIII (American Edition; Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1963), p.139.

⁴ Rudolf Thiel, Luther (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1955), p.272.

own disciples who were clamoring for reform measures, but he "pushed the great cause among the princes."¹ When he heard that the Duke of Savoy had spoken favorably to his cause, he sent the Duke "the main articles of his Gospel," so that the teaching might spread all over France from Savoy.²

Luther also tried to win over the support of Duke George but failed. In trying to make up with King Henry of England, whom he had insulted greatly, Luther only got himself laughed at, as Henry would have none of it. Luther probably would not have tried to win the support of such men if he did not really think the temporal lords "must implement the external work of the Reformation."³ In seeking their support, though, he always hoped that there would be no actual fighting among the peoples of Germany.

Luther was not restricted in the way he spoke to the rulers. If he felt the occasion demanded it, he would speak in terms of admonition. If praise were required, he would give it. He always spoke highly of his elector, Frederick, and yet he did not flatter him. He had no hesitation in pointing out to Frederick his human weaknesses and his Christian duties.⁴ He also criticized Frederick for having so many relics and thinking so highly of them.

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., pp.272-273.

4 Grimm, op. cit., p.89.

Luther also was not adverse to asking help from the princes when the occasion arose. In the summer of 1518 the Curia had charged him with heresy because of Tetzel and his complaints against him. The Curia had summoned Luther to Rome to be tried at the papal court. In a letter to Spalatin, August 8, 1518, Luther asked Spalatin to ask the Elector and other princes to intervene for him, so that his trial¹ could be held in Germany before impartial judges. Later on, while on his way back from the Wartburg, Luther wrote to Spalatin again, this time on behalf of the whole German people. He told Spalatin it was the duty of the Elector to provide for the salvation of his people and "to keep the wolves from destroying them."²

The Christian ruler, according to Luther, must always see to it that the way is kept open for the preaching of the Word of God. The Christian ruler was "in no circumstances³ relieved of his responsibilities to God and man." In a letter to the princes of Saxony Luther contends that the princes should not stand in the way of the ministers' preaching the Word, even if they are not members of the Church. However, if these preachers, or others, begin to use physical violence in forcing their views upon others, then the government should restrain them. Ministers, the religious

1 Krodel, op. cit., p.70.

2 Walther Brandt, ed., Luther's Works, XLV (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1958), p.78.

3 Grimm, op. cit., p.82.

leaders of the people, should be concerned with the Word and not with force.¹ "For," Luther says, "they are not Christians who want to go beyond the Word and to use violence...."² This thought was directed primarily against the sects and the trouble they caused, but the same ideas against the use of force by men of the Church applied to the Romans too.

In his concern over the function of the state as a governmental power Luther was also insistent that the German government keep itself strictly separated from any foreign influence.³ As Waring states, "One of the most marked features of Luther's work was his call for an absolute resistance on the part of the rulers of Germany to foreign interference in their own temporal affairs."⁴ The princes were quite willing to go along with this idea, too. When Charles tried to form an empire in Germany along Renaissance lines, the opposition of the princes was strongly put forth. Although this opposition was not caused by Lutheranism, it certainly was accentuated by it.⁵ To their traditional old watchwords for their German country were added the watchwords of Gospel

1 Martin Luther, Luther's Works, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, XL (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1958), p.57.

2 Ibid., p.59.

3 Op. cit., p.107.

4 Ibid.

5 Grimm, op. cit., p.88.

and liberty, both designed to strengthen their autonomy.¹

The German princes also helped to keep their "liberty" by maintaining control of the Imperial Diets. They were conservative in their social and economic policies and clung to all they thought was good in the old order. Many princes became Lutheran, many stayed Roman Catholic. But, in any case, it was the princes in Germany, not a king, as in other European countries, that were taking care of the problems² of the time.

And so it was that when Luther wanted to make a great appeal to the people of Germany to rid themselves of all foreign influence, especially that of Rome, he wrote to the princes, to the leaders of Germany. The Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation was one of the great works Luther produced in the year 1520 in which he sought reform on a large scale. Here he appealed to all the German people to back the reform effort and free the nation from the tyranny of Rome. In this appeal he goes into great detail about the way Rome had been interfering with the German government and with the moneys and liberties of the German people. Waring says, "He declared there was neither right or reason in the exactions and claims of the pope³ and the Church of Rome over the German people."

1 Ibid.

2 Harold J. Grimm, "Social Forces in the German Reformation," Church History, XXXI, p.7.

3 Op. cit., p.306.

Luther warned the people not to let Rome take such control over Germany as it had in other places. Italy was in a state of economic ruin because all wealth had to go to the Church at Rome.¹ He further complained of the pope's robbing the German people by extracting so much money, and so he "called energetically upon the nobility of Germany to put an end to these Romish depredations."²

Luther did not want Rome to exert any spiritual control over Germany either. He wanted to expel from Germany the papal legates, who were always trying to get more money out of the people. He was also opposed to the Mendicant Orders of the monks, saying that their strolling through³ the countryside like beggars never did anyone any good.

Toward the end of his Address Luther called upon the emperor and the whole empire to unite against Rome. He wanted the empire to set itself free from Rome. He said it is the duty of the emperor to behave like one and not allow a foreign power to dictate to him how he should direct his empire. Especially should the empire and its emperor free itself from the "hypocritical pretensions of a pope."⁴

Luther loved his Germany, and despite the many divisions⁵ he looked upon it as one entity. Luther wanted a united

1 D'Aubigné, op. cit., p.306.

2 Ibid., p.307.

3 Ibid., p.308.

4 Ibid., p.310.

5 Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p.226.

Germany, with its government made up of Germans, who were concerned with the problems of Germany.¹ His appeal to the German nobility was an appeal to the rulers of Germany to keep out foreign influence and govern Germany for the good of its people. His appeal was also one for his people to become united in civil government and form a national state. It never resulted in an actual union but it did succeed in getting rid of foreign rule.² As evidence that the German people felt much the same way that Luther did on the matter of foreign influence, D'Aubigné³ says that the appeal of Luther produced stirring affects among the people. It won the nation to his side, and "Nothing could have been more advantageous to the reformer than this publication."

Thus it was that Luther gathered a great deal of support for himself with considerably less effort than someone of a different land would have had to exert. The German people were ready for someone to take the lead of their nation, someone to whom they could look as a national symbol. And Luther made use of this feeling among his people. In his dealings with the people he let them know what God expected of them, and it did not always coincide with what the Church had been telling them. The people appreciated this, as they had had doubts about the Church for many years.

1 Waring, op. cit., p. 126.

2 Ibid., p.127.

3 D'Aubigné, op. cit., p.312.

Luther also spoke directly to the princes. He felt no qualms about asking for their support nor in telling them how they ought to govern themselves as Christian princes and their lands as Christian lands. This feeling of Luther's was important for the later success of the Reformation. As has been seen, the princes did not care to have their rights of government taken over by a foreign power, but Luther made the point stand out even more sharply in their minds. He appealed directly to the princes. He expected them to help him in his efforts. He also promised them his obedience and loyalty. Luther certainly did not expect the princes to accomplish everything that he was looking for in the way of reform. He relied most heavily on God for help. But he did look for the support of the princes along the way, and he did not refuse it when it came by saying that only God was allowed to do anything for the Church. It is to such help, both expected and received, that this paper now directs itself.

CHAPTER IV

FROM THE POSTING OF THE NINETY-FIVE THESES TO THE ELECTION OF CHARLES V AS EMPEROR OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

The period from October 31, 1517, when Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg, to the election of Charles V as Holy Roman Emperor was a period of relative freedom for Luther. It was during this period that he firmly entrenched himself in the hearts of the German people and won the support of Frederick the Wise. The period was rather short, however, and Luther soon found himself facing the combined hatred of the papacy and the emperor. During this period of less than two years Luther succeeded in arousing the ire of the pope, and it did not take long after that for things to start moving against Luther. In June of 1520, almost exactly one year after the election of Charles, the papal bull of excommunication was issued against Luther. It was published in Leipzig in September by Eck and in Wittenberg in October. In actuality the bull had little effect on Luther, for instead of bringing him into the hands of the papacy, it turned the people of Germany to Luther's side.¹ The following year, 1521, the Diet of Worms saw the ban of the emperor placed upon Luther, with the result that he had to spend time in a forced exile so that he would not be handed over to the emperor. This short period in Luther's life, when he was free from papal

¹ Kidd, op. cit., p.74.

and imperial ban, is the subject of this chapter.

In the Summer of 1518 Pope Leo X issued a citation to Luther. It stated that he was to appear in Rome before the papal court for a hearing. Leo also appointed Silvestro Mazzolini of Prierio to form an opinion regarding Luther's position. The citation and the opinion reached Luther on August 7, 1518.¹ In effect Prierio said that the pope was the virtual head of the Church, and anyone who said the pope could not do what he wanted to regarding indulgences was a heretic. If Luther had gone to Rome, therefore, he would have been condemned quite speedily. However, the Elector Frederick intervened, and with his political skill succeeded in having the place of the hearing changed from Rome to Augsburg.²

The hearing was conducted by the papal legate, Cajetan. Luther appeared before Cajetan on October 12-14, 1518, but he was not allowed to defend himself or to speak out on any subject. Cajetan wanted only a recantation.³ Luther answered this demand with a protest to the Diet and with an appeal to Leo. He returned to Wittenberg on October 31. Following this Luther prepared another appeal, as he was not satisfied with the first one, this time to a future general council.

As Luther was returning from Augsburg, where he had

1 Ibid., p.32.

2 Walker, op. cit., p.306.

3 Kidd, op. cit., p.32.

appeared before Cajetan, he was admired all along the way as a real hero for having stood up against Rome and for not yielding in any one point.¹ The people actually hoped Rome would continue to be obstinate and unyielding and thereby might bring about her own destruction. She was foolish in despising the Germans.

After the hearing at Augsburg was over and Luther had returned to his home, Cajetan sent a letter to Frederick the Wise. In the letter Cajetan laid all the blame for the failure of negotiations at Augsburg on Luther. Only because of Luther's obstinacy had the negotiations broken down. Therefore, if Frederick "did not wish to sacrifice his honor and wanted to heed the voice of his conscience, he could not but deliver the shabby mendicant."² Cajetan wanted Frederick to deliver Luther into his hands, so he could take him back to Rome. Cajetan said Luther's teachings were against Rome and were heretical, and so Frederick could do nothing other than turn Luther over to Rome.

Frederick, however, did not act right away. He sent a copy of the letter to Luther, asking Luther's advice on the matter. Luther replied immediately, stating that Cajetan's arguments were unfounded and unproven. He said Cajetan was asking Frederick to give him up without even trying to designate precisely why. He had not proven Luther guilty of heresy.³

1 D'Aubigné, op. cit., p.226.

2 Heinrich Boehmer, Road to Reformation (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1946), p.245.

3 Ibid.

Luther, however, did not want to cause his Elector any trouble, so he told Frederick he would give himself up if it would be for the good of his land and his prince. There seems to have been some additional correspondence between Luther and Frederick in which Luther promised to leave Wittenberg right away and so avoid further complications for Frederick.¹ Luther's friends, however, tried to discourage Luther from running away and rather turn himself over to the Elector Frederick.

Actually Luther had nothing to fear from Frederick, for Frederick had no intention of turning over Luther to the papal legate. He did not even want to force Luther into exile. All the counselors of Frederick, and even the majority of the people in the University, spoke favorably of Luther and advised Frederick not to harm him but to let him continue his work. Frederick, therefore, was not about to be persuaded by any foreigners against the good advice of his own people.² In December Frederick asked these counselors for a final decision regarding Luther, and they unanimously voted against anything being done to him. Luther was not to be surrendered to the pope's men.

On December 18, 1518, Frederick sent a letter to Cajetan stating his decision not to deliver Luther. In the words of Boehmer,

1 Ibid., p.246.

2 Ibid., p.247.

This decided Luther's future. For Frederick was one of those slow-moving persons who require a great deal of time to reach a definite conclusion concerning a person or situation but, once it is reached, hardly ever allow themselves to be diverted from the opinion but cling to it with the greatest perseverance. And so from this time on he adhered steadfastly to Luther although it was often made very difficult for him not only by Luther's enemies but also by Luther himself. 1

Schwiebert is also highly complimentary in his description of Frederick.

The clever way in which this prince guided the affairs of Saxony during the critical years between 1517 and 1525 won him the appellation of The Wise. His sense of fairness, instinctive caution, and sound judgement made all the attempts to win him over to the side of Rome futile. He founded the University of Wittenberg in 1502 and took a very enlightened interest in its development and influence on German life. The contributions of this farsighted prince to the cause of the German Reformation can hardly be overestimated. 2

Not everything in Saxony was favorable to the Reformation. The ruling family of Albertine Saxony was not so enthusiastic about supporting Luther and his followers. Duke George became ruler of this territory in 1500 and ruled till 1539. He was reared under strict Roman Catholic tutelage and had even begun to study for the priesthood. He was kindly disposed to Luther at first, but eventually he changed his mind. He turned from Luther entirely after the Diet of Worms, 1521, and proved to be Luther's bitterest enemy from that time on. When George died, his milder brother, Henry, took over and ruled for three years. He favored the reform

1 Ibid., p.249.

2 Op. cit., p.82.

3 Ibid., p.84.

movement, and so during his reign Lutheranism began to take over all of Saxony. Henry soon died, though, and his son, Moritz, became ruler. He was a political schemer and favored sides as it proved good for him. Fortunately for the Reformation¹ cause he died in the Schmalkaldic War in 1553.

The Elector Frederick, very shortly after his dealings with Cajetan, had opportunity to be of service to Luther again. Even before the election of Charles V as Holy Roman Emperor the pope made attempts to have Germany silence Luther. Elector Frederick was a man of considerable importance and the pope wanted to show him some favor, since the imperial elections were at hand. Actually the pope favored Francis of France, but when he realized things were not going his way, he decided to try something different. He sent a messenger, Charles von Miltitz, a Saxon nobleman by birth, who served the pope in Rome as papal chamberlain and agent for² the courts of Saxony, to Frederick the Wise in October 1518. Miltitz left Rome in November and got to Saxony for interviews with Spalatin and Frederick in December. As a result of these meetings he "disavowed Tetzel and disgraced that worthy at Leipzig."³ He hoped thereby to win some support from Frederick. Also at one of these meetings Miltitz gave a Golden Rose to Frederick as symbol of the pope's high

1 Ibid., p.85.

2 Kidd., op. cit., p.41.

3 Ibid.

favor and in an attempt to influence Frederick to force Luther to stop his evil ways and to become a candidate for emperor himself. Miltitz even promised a cardinal's hat to Frederick which Frederick could give to anyone he wanted, maybe even to Luther.¹ After the meetings with the Elector, Miltitz went to Altenburg, where he met with Luther in the house of Spalatin on January 6, 1519. Luther responded to this meeting with letters to the Elector, to Staupitz, and to Leo, in each case claiming himself innocent of the charges of heresy and asking for a public hearing.² In its final effort the whole plan of the pope and Miltitz failed, because Elector Frederick was too cautious and honest to accept these overtures from the pope.³ A promise was gained from Luther, though, that he would refrain from debating if his opponents would.

The debating went on, however, and with increasing importance. In March of 1519 Luther called upon the Elector, again, for assistance. He complained that Eck, a professor at the University of Inglostadt, had attacked him, and he wanted a chance to respond. Arrangements were made for the debate to be held at Leipzig, although this was not easily accomplished. The Chancellor of the University did not want the debate to be held there.⁴ This time, however, another

1 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.42.

2 Kidd., op. cit., p.41.

3 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.42.

4 Kidd, op. cit., p.45.

prince came to the aid of Luther. Duke George, who came to be much opposed to Luther shortly after Leipzig, sent a letter to the Chancellor of the University telling him to permit the debate.¹ The Chancellor had to go along with the will of his prince, so the debate was arranged. In actuality the debate was drawn up between Eck and Karlstadt over the matter of supreme authority, whether it belonged to the Church or to the Bible.²

On June 27 and 28 Eck and Karlstadt debated on the matter of grace and free will. The following month, July 4 to 8, Luther had opportunity to debate with Eck on the matter of the primacy of the pope. During the debate Eck drew from Luther the statements that the pope and councils had erred upon occasion, and that there was something of the truth in what the Hussites had preached. Eck felt himself victorious as a result of this, for it represented a break with the whole authoritative system of the Middle Ages.³ Luther was thus placed in an unfortunate position, for he had firmly established himself against the accepted authority, the Church.⁴ There was no turning back on either side. It only remained to be seen how long this German monk could hold out against the legal arm of the Church. If there was ever a time when Luther needed assistance from the princes, it was then.

1 Ibid., pp.46-47.

2 Walker, op. cit., p.307.

3 Ibid.

4 Latourette, op. cit., p.710.

It was precisely at that time that service was rendered to the Reformation cause from a source other than the Elector himself. Ulrich von Hutten, who was already mentioned in connection with German humanism, came forward to assist Luther. Two dialogues were published by him in 1519-1520. The first, Vadiscus or Trias Romana, lashed out at the papal court. The second, Inspicientes, gave the reason for the Germans being exploited by the Italians as the "drunken stupidity of his fellow countrymen."¹ Luther certainly must have been aware that he was not alone, realizing that much of Germany was supporting him. In September, 1520, von Hutten wrote a letter to the Elector, trying to gather together all of Germany in opposition to Rome. Such writings, plus the continued efforts of von Hutten, were "real services rendered to the reform."²

As has been noticed earlier the strong feelings of the German people for their own common ties and loyalties, apart from foreign influences, had been becoming more and more prominent in the early years of the sixteenth century. It was even more apparent as the death of Maximillian approached, and the election of a new emperor became imminent. The people felt that the Roman Catholic Church did not care enough about the German people. In its handling of Church affairs the Roman Church did not concern itself with the

1 Kidd, op. cit., p.57.

2 Ibid.

nationality feelings of people. But the Germans felt such consideration was necessary. God's word is always to the individual. His words of promise, command, and love are not just something to be read and memorized. Man must be a personality, definite and distinct from others.¹ The individual is affected by national ties, as well as by many other influences, so these ties must be considered in telling the Gospel. The Gospel must reach the individual. Preaching must not be just general, but to the people. This also includes the law under which the people live, so in preaching one must consider the general laws given to humans and the specific laws given by the nation. The Roman Church gave no such consideration to the people of Germany or to their² land.

Maximillian died on January 12, 1519, and Charles, his grandson, was elected emperor in June of the same year. With the election of Charles V the people of Germany found some reason to show signs of hope. They thought that perhaps there was something to pin their hopes on, for Charles had been chosen over the French king, and Charles was of German blood. However, when he "denied himself to the German popular movement" with his denouncement of Luther at Worms in 1521, the new nationalistic tendencies turned toward the territorial³ princes.

1 Bornkamm, op. cit., p.219.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., p.221.

Relying on the territorial princes was not just an idle gesture, for, as has been mentioned, with the princes of Germany lay the real authority in the land. Some of the extent of their power can be seen from the pledge which the electors forced Charles to take before they elected him emperor of their land. In the pledge Charles promised to protect their rights and privileges. It is given quite completely in Waring's Political Theories of Martin Luther:

Without the consent of the electors, he would not involve the empire in any alliance or war, part with any of the possessions of the empire, levy any taxes upon the estates, impose any new tolls or increase any already existing, hold imperial diets, or enlist foreign troops in the imperial service. He further pledged himself to appoint none but natives of Germany to imperial office, to use only the German and Latin languages in the affairs of state, to maintain peace and order, to use the revenues of the crown for the public good, to re-establish the imperial regency or council of administration, and to reside as much as possible within the bounds of the empire. The estates were not to be subject to any jurisdiction beyond the bounds of the empire...and no one should be placed under the ban of the empire without previous formal trial. ¹

The election of Charles was also important to Luther. Charles was of German blood and supposedly was favorable to reform. ² So Luther decided to address himself to Charles, "the young and noble sovereign by whom God has roused great hopes in many hearts." ³ He made the address in the treatise already discussed, To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation. Luther made the appeal at the same time that Eck was

¹ Waring, op. cit., p.58.

² Kidd, op. cit., p.62.

³ Ibid.

in Rome preparing the arrangements that were to result in a¹ bull of excommunication against Luther. Kidd says of the address that, "It was an appeal in German directed to the laity, urging them to take reform in hand for themselves, on the ground that, in virtue of their priesthood, spiritual authority rested with them."² Luther was hoping, here, to rally the support of the German nobles to his cause, including the help of Charles V, the Emperor. If Charles would throw his support, or even consent, to the Reformation, the pope would have to listen.

The appeal of Luther came at a most fitting time. It was between the election of Charles as Emperor and his coronation in Rome by the pope. It was a time of much instability and unsettlement in the government. And it was during the time of the great religious stir that Luther had started in³ 1517.

Charles did not fulfill the hopes of the German people, nor did he give Luther the help Luther sought. In fact he proved to be a real problem to Luther. Charles looked upon himself as "the supreme secular officer of the Church," and, therefore, he looked upon his governing role as a dual one, not only to control his empire, but the Holy Roman Empire, "to establish the Christianity sovereignty expected for⁴ centuries." Charles wanted unity, one empire and one Church.

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Waring, op. cit., p.59.

4 Blayney, op. cit., p.49.

He never accomplished his goal, however, for he was stopped politically by the appearance of nations, people giving their chief loyalty to prince and territory, and he was stopped religiously by the Reformation, "a faith seeking God individually."¹

Immediately after his election Charles could have hindered the Reformation and Luther greatly, because the pope, through Aleander, had tried to get Charles to condemn Luther right away. But Charles would not condemn Luther without a trial, as this would be breaking his oath (to govern justly)² and might lead to a civil war.

The first two years of Luther as a public personality, then, were momentous ones. Between his Ninety-five Theses and the coming of Charles V he had moved from the quiet life of the monastery to the discussion tables of Germany and Rome. He had remained a territorial figure, however, during most of the time, but with the election of Charles and the first imperial diet under Charles Luther emerged as a truly national figure. The fact that he had not been destroyed by the Church during this period can be traced to the guiding hand of God, who was certainly looking out for His beloved child. And, yet, that guiding hand of a loving God showed itself most positively through the human hands and minds of men such as Frederick the Wise, Ulrich von

1 Ibid., p.51.

2 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.45.

Hutten, and even Duke George and Charles V.

To the beginning of the real trouble in Luther's life, to the Diet of Worms and the succeeding years, the direction of this paper now turns.

CHAPTER V

FROM THE DIET OF WORMS, 1520, TO THE DIET OF SPEIER, 1529

Another well-defined period in the life of Luther and the Reformation is the period between the Diet of Worms, when Luther fell under the imperial ban, and the Diet of Speier of 1529, where the name Protestant first came into being. The Diet of Speier was important because it placed the Protestant cause into an extremely dark position. If the princes did not form some sort of union, the Reformation might well have ended in 1529. The rulers of the German territories, however, did not back down on their support of the true teaching of the Gospel, and they began to organize themselves into an effective opposition to the Roman Catholic authority. The Diet of Augsburg, 1530, marked the beginning of still another Reformation period, for there the German Lutheran princes definitely stood up to the emperor and avowed their faith. It is with the period from Worms to Speier, approximately eight and a half years, that the present chapter deals.

The Diet of Worms was the first imperial diet called by Charles V. It was summoned in November, 1520, but Luther did not appear before it until April, 1521. Although Worms was actually the place at which Luther was condemned by the Emperor, put under imperial ban, still the fact that he had been heard at all at the Diet was due to the Emperor. Alexander had come to the Emperor with the pope's bull against Luther,

but Charles' ambassador to Rome advised him to treat a certain Friar Martin well, because the pope was afraid of him. Charles thought this would give him added strength against the pope's defecting to Francis I and would also satisfy the German anti-papal feeling, so he allowed Luther to be heard¹ at the Diet.

In any case Charles was unable to take any extended action against Luther at the Diet, because there were more pressing matters to be dealt with first. The German princes wanted a change in the government of the empire, the creation of the Reichsregiment, an administrative body that would operate in Germany during those times when the Emperor would be gone for extended periods of time.² Charles also needed the vote of the princes for men and money to be used in an upcoming war with France. He also needed their vote for money for his trip to Rome, as he would not become an official emperor till he was crowned by the pope.³

When Charles did get around to hearing Luther, he was soon convinced that Luther was a heretic, and so his help for the Reformation cause did not last long.⁴ After hearing of Luther's disappearance in the vicinity of the Wartburg, after Luther had left the Diet, Charles issued the Edict of

1 Kidd, op. cit., pp.79-80.

2 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.44.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

Worms, making Luther an outlaw.¹ At this point Walker says,

Had Germany been controlled by a strong central authority Luther's career would soon have ended in martyrdom. Not even an imperial edict, however, could be executed against the will of a vigorous territorial ruler, and Frederick the Wise proved once more Luther's salvation.²

More of the support of the German people was directed to Luther as a result of the Diet. The people had looked to Charles to advance their cause, but he had let them down. He had not felt the real heartbeat of the German people, and so Luther became the symbol of unity "in the awakening national consciousness."³

From May 4, 1521, to March 3, 1522, Luther was hidden safely in the Wartburg Castle near Eisenach. He had been put there forcibly by the friendly hands of Frederick. While he was there Luther did a great deal of writing. He increased his attacks on the abuses of the Church and kept in contact with his good Elector. Probably his greatest effort during the months of his exile was his translation of the New Testament into idiomatic and readable German.⁴ It was also important in that, as Walker says, "It largely determined the form of speech that should mark future German literature."⁵

Another important writing of Luther's from the Wartburg

1 Ibid., p.45.

2 Op. cit., p.311.

3 Bornkamm, op. cit., p.222.

4 Walker, op. cit., p.311.

5 Ibid.

concerned the duties of the civil government and was written to Frederick. In that letter Luther stated that the prince is God's magistrate, his "gardener and caretaker and the country's father and aid, to whom God has entrusted especially his noblest treasure, his merry paradise, the youth, for protection and direction."¹ Luther told Frederick that the government was there to put a constraining force on sin, for otherwise sin would turn the world into chaos. So even while in actual seclusion, Luther could not refrain from speaking out on those matters that were of utmost importance to him. He did not want Frederick to lessen his efforts favorable to the Reformation.

The next major effort in the attempt to stop the movement of the Reformation was the Diet of Nürnberg which began in November, 1522. Adrian VI was now pope, and he was entirely unsympathetic toward "the New Learning or the New Theology."² He did want disciplinary reform, though, and he tried to impress this upon the Germans at the Diet. However, in a Brief sent to the Diet in January, 1523, he stated that he wanted repressions first, and the matter of reform could wait till later.³ The Estates of the Diet did not approve of such measures, though, and they replied with a demand for a free Christian council. When the legate remonstrated in

1 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.244.

2 Kidd, op. cit., pp.105-106.

3 Ibid.

February of the same year, the Estates answered with a reaffirmation of the Gravamina. It was entirely the work of the lay estates, and as Kidd states, "the Diet threw its shield over Lutheranism, which was within an ace of becoming a national movement."¹

Adrian died in November, 1523, and was succeeded by Clement VII, who was responsible enough in character but had little feeling of the great religious importance of the German situation.² Clement appointed as his legate Campeggio, who was to handle the affairs in Germany for the pope. The Reichstag was newly assembled in Nürnberg in the Spring of 1524, and to it Campeggio went, "only to find public feeling against him."³ At the Diet Campeggio demanded that the princes enforce the Edict of Worms, but the national feeling was so strong in the assembly that he was able to accomplish nothing.⁴ He did manage to secure a Recess, April 18, which proposed that the Edict would be enforced as much as possible. A new national assembly was to be assembled in Speier the following Fall.

Although Campeggio affected little at the Diet, he did accomplish something of great importance outside the Diet. He was influential in getting a league formed whose purpose it was to support the Roman cause in Germany. It was formed

1 Ibid.

2 Walker, op. cit., p.317.

3 Kidd, op. cit., p.133.

4 Ibid.

in Regensburg of "the Emperor's brother, Ferdinand, the Dukes of Bavaria, and a number of south German bishops."¹ The effort of the league was also to concern the matter of reform in the Church in Germany, and certain minor reforms actually were achieved. The main result of the league, however, was to widen further the split in the parties in Germany "and to strengthen the line of demarcation on the basis of the possessions of the rival territorial princes."² The German nation was hopelessly divided.

The deadlock in the Nürnberg Diet, which Campeggio had used for his own benefits, was also made use of by the reformers. Some eighty-four towns and free cities in Germany used the decree of the Diet (that nothing against the pure Gospel should be taught) for their own account and began to recognize the reform preachers openly.³ The Reformation movement thus experienced some rather rapid growth. Kidd sums it up as follows:

Thus reform prevailed by the decision of the townsmen in 1523 at Frankfurt on the Main, Schwäbisch Hall and Magdeburg; in 1524 at Ulm, Strassburg, Bremen, and Nürnberg. In most of the towns of (North) Germany... we see preachers arise, the Lutheran hymns become popular, and the congregations take part in religious questions; the Council at first makes a greater or less resistance, but at length gives way. So in the South at Nürnberg. 4

1 Walker, op. cit., p.317.

2 Ibid.

3 Kidd, op. cit., p.164.

4 Ibid.

Shortly after the Diet of Nürnberg something occurred which had rather disastrous effects on the Reformation cause. The Reichsregiment set up at Worms met three times during the absence of Charles V, while he was fighting the French. They decided at these meetings that the Edict of Worms could not be enforced without stirring up popular opposition. There was too much demand in Germany for the "pure Gospel,"¹ so that condemning Luther would probably cause a civil war. Actually, the next year, 1525, a peasants' rebellion broke out, that occurrence which was to be disastrous to the Reformation. It was not the first time the peasants had revolted. Such fightings had been occurring frequently for fifty years, but the one in 1525 was to influence greatly the movement of reform in Germany.

Luther became highly displeased with the fighting of the peasants and finally threw himself to the side of the princes. He wrote a pamphlet in May, 1525, entitled Wider die mörderischen und rauberischen Rotten der Bauern, in² which he voiced his disapproval of the war. The princes took Luther at his word, and so John of Saxony and Philip of Hesse joined with the Catholic princes George of Saxony and Henry of Brunswick to crush the peasants at Frankenhausen on May 15, 1525. It turned out to be a costly victory, however, for it served to separate the Reformation from the popular

1 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.54.

2 Kidd, op. cit., p.170.

sympathies and turned it over into the hands of the princes.¹

Another event which helped weaken Luther's cause took place in May, 1525, the death of Elector Frederick. He had been a tremendous help to Luther, as has been evidenced, and his death was most unfortunate.

Almost at the same time as Frederick's death the division of princes into permanent opposition groups became formalized. Because of the peasants' revolt Duke George of Saxony became alarmed and united with a number of Catholic princes and dukes to "extirpate the root of this disturbance,² the damned Lutheran sect." This union took place in July, 1525.

To protect themselves against the Catholic league the new Elector, John, and the Landgrave, Philip, organized a league of their own in February, 1526. This alliance became the League of Torgau and soon included a number of other³ princes and dukes. So the opposing sides were now formed. The princes were definitely a part of the reform effort, and a most considerable part.

In June, 1526, a Diet met at Speier. Charles was honeymooning at the time, so he was not in attendance. He left⁴ official control up to his brother, Ferdinand. The Diet

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., p.181.

3 Ibid.

4 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.54.

failed to solve the problem of reform, however, for the sides had become too strongly formed, and a united Germany was out of the question.¹ So at the suggestion of the princes the Diet decided to revert to the policy of territorialism, the only solution that made any sense to them. They sent to Charles and asked him to let them interpret the Edict of Worms as each prince "would be ready to answer before God and His Imperial Majesty."²

The principle of cuius regio eius religio, an idea that was not at all new, permitted Luther and his friends at Wittenberg "to begin their investigations of conditions and to further the establishment of schools and churches in the territories of John the Constant (Frederick's successor)."³ As the wars kept Charles away for a couple of years after the Diet, the new school system was able to be established under the protection of the Saxon princes.

Some other helpful effects of Speier were: Bugenhagen was preaching Lutheran doctrine in the North, Philip of Hesse was planning to get Luther and Zwingli together to form a union, and Johannes Brenz was leading an evangelical movement of revival in the Southwest.⁴

Following the recess of Speier were years of recon-

1 Kidd, op. cit., p.181.

2 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.54.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p.57.

struction ~~for~~ the Lutherans. This was possible because the Emperor was too involved in his wars with the pope to interfere; because his brother, Ferdinand, was crowned king of Bohemia and of Hungary in 1527 and so was too much plagued by the Turks to bother with the Lutherans; and because the Lutherans interpreted the Recess of Speier to mean they could make ecclesiastical regulations as well as political regulations.²

Prussia led the way in the organization of Lutheran communities, even though it was outside the empire. The Margrave Albert of Brandenburg was ruler over eastern Prussia and in 1525 secularized its territories. He received the territories back "as an hereditary Dukedom under the suzerainty of Poland."³ There were two dioceses in his realm, and these were both reformed under their bishops, together with the preachers in the area. In September, 1526, he was received⁴ into the League of Torgau.

In Saxony the reform movement moved ahead with great speed. Luther had wanted each of the communities there to be free, but the peasants' war changed his leanings to more state regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. He felt the papal and episcopal discipline was gone in 1526, so in

1 Kidd, op. cit., p.185.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

November of that year he pleaded with the Elector to take over the matter.¹ Commissioners were thus appointed to keep check on the churches of the territories. The Instructions to Visitors which were drawn up eventually, to serve as guides for the men who were sent to act as supervisors, were the work of Melanchthon, with a preface by Luther. Most of lower Germany adhered to the directives.

There were two rulers in Brandenburg-Anspach, the Catholic Margrave Casimir, and the Lutheran Margrave George. At first they agreed that preachers should confine themselves to the pure word of God, but nothing be said against the Mass which was to continue as before. In March, 1528, however, George established the new order of things, "...and in 1533 there appeared the Church Order of Brandenburg-Nürnberg which had some influence on the English Prayer Book and became the parent of an important family of Church Orders."²

The territory of Hesse soon followed suit. At first the Church there had been based on the independence of each community but later became changed to follow the Saxon ordinances.³ The area of Brunswick-Lüneburg became Lutheran⁴ in 1527.

1 Ibid., p.186.

2 Ibid., p.187.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

Brunswick, the city, accepted the new order of things in 1528 and developed a new Church Order, the Brunswick Church Order. It was important because it "became the model of a second and generally conservative group of ordinances in Hamburg 1529, Pomerania 1535, and Schleswig-Holstein 1542."¹

All was not favorable to the Lutheran cause in the years 1526-1529. The war that had kept Charles busy since 1521 was over in 1529, and Charles could now turn his full attention to the cause in Germany. The Diet that met in Speier in 1529, therefore, was bound to be one of vital importance to the Lutherans in Germany. The Diet opened in February, 1529, and had a Catholic majority. Walker gives the following description of the Diet:

That Reichstag now ordered, by a majority decision, that no further ecclesiastical changes should be made, that Roman worship should be permitted in Lutheran lands, and that all Roman authorities and orders should be allowed full enjoyment of their former rights, property, and incomes. This would have been the practical abolition of the Lutheran territorial churches. Unable to defeat this legislation, the Lutheran civil powers represented in the Reichstag, on April 19, 1529, entered a formal protest of great historical importance, the Protestatio, since it led to the designation of the party as "Protestant".²

The Protestant cause looked dim. A firm league of princes was needed, and this Philip attempted to secure as quickly as possible.

Throughout the period from Worms to Speier the Lutheran

¹ Ibid.

² Op. cit., p.320.

cause actually moved ahead with considerable speed in Germany. The princes had come to the aid of the movement with all the influence at their disposal. The fact that Charles had been absent during most of the time made the situation advantageous for the reformers, for he represented the greatest threat to their work in Germany. The growth of the various churches under the direction of the reform teachings showed definitely that the princes were of vital importance to the spread of the movement. Luther himself had been protected by the prince. An attempt had been made, with the Edict of Worms, to silence Luther and his followers, but, as was shown, the Edict was never enforced. The princes refused to let themselves and their subjects be controlled by an outsider. They demanded the right to administer their lands and their churches according to their own consciences, and nothing could change their minds. That period of relative growth for reform and Lutheranism soon met with severe opposition, however, and it is to the strong efforts of Charles to stop the growth, and to the Lutheran reaction to that effort, that the paper now directs itself.

CHAPTER VI

FROM THE DIET OF AUGSBURG, 1530, TO LUTHER'S DEATH, 1546

The closing sixteen years of Luther's life marked a period of grave seriousness in the German lands. It was a period when the opposition groups, Catholic and Lutheran, became so firmly set in their respective convictions that no attempt by Emperor or anyone else could hope to unite them. The Diet of Augsburg, which ushered in the period, set the stage for the eventual conflict which had to come between the two groups. After Augsburg the Reformation cause was so thoroughly combined with the territorial problem in Germany that the princes, in effect, stole the spotlight from the theologians. Luther's death did not mark an end to the trouble by any means. The war between the Roman Catholic princes and the Lutherans of the Schmalkaldic League was yet to come. The main thrust of the paper, however, concerns itself with the life of Luther and his associations with the rulers of Germany, so the end of his life marks a convenient place to stop. The present chapter deals with this very explosive political period of Reformation history between the Diet of Augsburg and the end of Luther's life.

When the useless struggle between Charles V and Francis I was over and the peace was signed at Cambrai in August, 1529, Charles decided it was time to settle the German problem once and for all. He first went to Rome, where he was to be crowned by the pope in January, 1530. From Rome he sent to

Germany a call for a Reichstag to meet in Augsburg. He showed a certain friendliness in the call that was really unexpected. The purpose of the meeting was to settle the religious problem, but Charles promised to give all sides¹ a fair hearing. Charles did not realize that by this time Lutheranism had gained such a strong foothold in central Europe, and that he had lost his chance to compose the religious differences and settle the religious problem.²

To get an understanding of the meaning of the Reformation movement in Germany Charles wanted the leaders of the movement to draw up a statement of their views and also of their objections to the established Church. The resulting effort came to be known as the Augsburg Confession. It was chiefly the work of Melanchthon, but Luther, Bugenhagen, and Jonas also had a part in it.³ The territorial rulers of Germany felt Charles would place little importance on a document that did not bear the signatures of those who put him on his throne, so the Confession was signed by seven princes and the representatives of two cities. No theologians signed it.

When the Confession was read before the Diet and the Emperor on June 25, 1530, the papal legate, Campeggio, suggested that it be examined by Catholic theologians in Augsburg. Charles agreed to the suggestion.

1 Walker, op. cit., p.334.

2 Schwiebert, op. cit., p.58.

3 Walker, op. cit., p.334.

In an attempt to conciliate the Roman Catholics and to unite the two sides Melanchthon showed himself willing to make concessions in the Confession. Walker says that such concessions "would have ruined the whole Lutheran cause, but fortunately for it the Evangelical princes were of sterner stuff."¹ Once, again, the princes proved an invaluable aid to the reform movement.

After examining the Confession the Romans prepared a document of their own, a confutation of the Confession. This, in turn, was answered by the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, which, when rewritten in a more careful fashion and published in 1531, came to be one of the most important of the Lutheran writings.²

The Roman Catholics who were members of the Diet, since they were in a majority, refused to accept the Apology, claiming the Lutherans had been "confuted" sufficiently by the work of the Roman theologians. The resulting decision of the Diet was that the Lutheran princes be given till April 15, 1531, to change their minds and conform, once again, to the Roman Catholic Church. Campeggio proposed to the Emperor that he try, by all means available, to bring back to the true Church those princes and cities that had left it (those who had signed the Confession), and Charles agreed. So the Diet closed, Kidd says, with the Protestants

¹ Ibid., p.335.

² Ibid.

having to face "coercion by force of arms after April 15,
¹
 1531.

What possibly could have been a strong German nation had been spoiled permanently by Charles. By trying to destroy the Reformation by force he drove the princes and the Reformation together and, as Bornkamm says, "sounded the death
²
 knell for the union of the empire."

Because the Diet had threatened to use force to put down the Protestant cause, some sort of defensive organization was needed if the Lutheran princes hoped to keep their territories and the right to worship in them. It was for this intent, then, that the Schmalkaldic League was brought into being. It was formally organized February 27, 1531. Kidd says of the League that, "Its importance lay less in the number of its adherents than in their differences of rank, belief, and geographical situation. Princes combined with cities, Lutheran with Zwinglian, north with south, in
³
 defense of a common cause." It was stated in the League, which they all signed, that since it looked as though those who had the pure word of God taught in their territories were going to be forbidden by force to do so; also, since it was the duty of every Christian prince to see to it that the true Word is preached to his people; therefore, they agreed

1 Kidd, op. cit., p.300.

2 Op. cit., p.257.

3 Op. cit., p.336.

to come to each other's aid in case any one was attacked on account of the word of God and the doctrine of the Gospel.¹

The League enabled the Lutheran princes to meet the Emperor on equal terms. The united opposition of the German princes proved that the position of Charles was not as strong in Germany as he had thought it was. And so the dreaded day of April 15 passed by without the result that had been threatened. The Emperor did not attack the Protestant princes.

Early in 1532 something else happened that gave added strength to the Protestant cause in Germany. The Turks were gathering for a new assault on Europe, and a united empire was absolutely necessary for the defense of Europe. Consequently, on July 23, 1532, the Emperor and the Protestants agreed to the Peace of Nürnberg.² By this truce all disputes over religion were to stop, and the Protestants were promised to be left in peace, at least until a general council could be called.³

It was during this period of guaranteed peace that another event took place that was important to the growth of Lutheranism in Germany. The Elector John of Saxony was succeeded by his son, John Frederick, as Duke of the Ernestine sections of Saxony. Schwiebert says that it was not

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., p.302.

3 Walker, op. cit., p.336.

until John Frederick became regent,

...that Lutheranism had a real champion in the Saxon court. Tutored by such men as George Spalatin and Caspar Lichten, this rugged enthusiastic prince grew up in a Lutheran atmosphere, and he was the first Elector of Saxony to become an ardent disciple of Martin Luther....Under his leadership the University was reorganized in 1535-1536 and for the first time became really Lutheran. Already at Augsburg in 1530 this zealous Lutheran prince had fought for the cause of the Reformation, and from 1532-1547 Lutheranism was to triumph under his tutelage. ¹

When the Turks' advance was stopped, and the Europeans had forced them to retreat, Charles did not return to fight against the Reformation, but, instead went to Rome. He was gone from the German lands for about nine years. He went to Rome, supposedly to expedite the long-called-for council for reform, but the court in Rome had many reasons for delaying such a council. ² During the time Charles was gone from Germany the Protestants were left free to pursue their own plans. In 1534 a number of cities and territories became Protestant, especially Württemberg and Pomerania. Württemberg's becoming Lutheran was important because, as Kidd ³ says, "It drove a wedge of Lutheranism into Upper Germany."

The progress of Protestantism was temporarily stopped by the bigamous marriage of Philip of Hesse, March 4, 1540. It detached Philip from the League and forced him into a ⁴ secret compact with the Emperor, June 13, 1541.

¹ Schwiebert, op. cit., p.84.

² Kidd, op. cit., p.304.

³ Ibid., p.305.

⁴ Ibid., p.307.

Luther died on February 18, 1546. The last years of his life had not been ones of complete happiness. He was not pleased with the divisions that had occurred among the reformers, and he was not happy about the political situation that had resulted from his efforts to have the pure Gospel preached to all his people in Germany. But Luther did have the comfort of the pure Gospel with him as he died. He knew that it would be preached in the land, even if it did mean fighting and revolution. His cause had not been defeated. He had survived the great threats of the Roman Church to get rid of him, and he had survived the attempts of the Emperor to destroy him. The events between Augsburg and his death assured Luther that the Reformation in Germany was not going to be stopped. The rulers of the land were behind the effort with all the support they could offer. Even though there was a Roman Catholic lineup of princes, also in Germany, opposed to the Reformation, the matter was determined; the Reformation was going to be continued by princes and people alike.

The Reformation in Germany moved ahead at a rapid rate in the period immediately following the death of Luther. The Roman Church retaliated with its Counter-Reformation, but it could not stop the movement. A brief look at the period right after Luther's death, when Germany was still very much aware of him, will be taken in the concluding chapter.

The year of Luther's death also marked the year of the long-expected war between Catholic and Protestant princes in Germany. Luther seemed to be the last obstacle to actual¹ fighting, and when he died, the way was opened for war. The Emperor lined up his allies and turned his attention to purging his empire of the Reformation. In 1547 the deaths of Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France left Charles without a rival in Europe. The pope sent troops to aid the Emperor in the battle against the Protestants, and in 1547 the Schmalkaldic League was defeated. John Frederick and Philip of Hesse were captured. The cause of Protestantism² looked dark.

A new outburst of jealousy between the pope and Emperor prevented any further destruction of the Reformation. The pope recalled his troops from Germany, and Charles decided to form a reformation church of his own in Germany, without the pope. To compose the religious differences of the realm Charles drew up the Augsburg Interim, which he hoped would be a working compromise for the fighting groups in his empire. The Interim would, in effect, have made the Church in Germany³ a reformed Catholic Church. Neither Catholic nor Lutheran prince would accept the Interim, however, and so Charles

1 Ibid., p.358.

2 Qualben, op. cit., p.280.

3 Ibid.

attempted to force it upon the people. The entire plan failed, though, for it never works to try to compromise in religious matters, especially when it is tried by force¹ of arms.

Gradually all of Germany became annoyed at Charles, because of his attempt to force the Interim upon them and because he was trying to change their German constitutional way of government for the Spanish type of absolutism.² The result was that fighting broke out again. The opposition was led by Maurice, Duke of Saxony. Maurice had fought with the Emperor during the first battle between the religious groups, because Charles had promised him the Saxon electorate for his support. Maurice now felt he had to redeem himself in the eyes of his German people, so he organized the opposition to the Emperor.³

In January, 1552, Maurice induced Henry II of France, by the Treaty of Chambord, to take the field in support of the Protestant princes in Germany, as Kidd states it, "as Protector of the liberties of Germany and its captive princes."⁴ That was the support the Germans needed, and the tide of the war was turned against the Emperor. On April 4, 1552, Maurice seized the city of Augsburg and forced the Emperor to flee across the Alps.⁵ Charles left the matter to his brother,

1 Kidd, op. cit., p.359.

2 Ibid., p.362.

3 Ibid., p.363.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

Ferdinand, to arrange terms with the Protestant princes. The fighting continued in different areas of Germany for three more years, but, finally, in September, 1555, there was signed the Peace of Augsburg,¹ labeled by Kidd, "an ambiguous but lasting settlement." By the Treaty the Lutherans received legal recognition in the empire. It was, however, only a victory for territorialism, not for toleration. Only the prince acquired the right to worship, and make his people² worship, according to the Augsburg Confession. It was, however, a step in the right direction and did stop the fighting.

Later struggles in the Reformation movement, such as, the disagreements among the Lutherans themselves and the Thirty Years War have shown that the Peace of Augsburg was by no means a permanent settlement to the religious problem in Germany and in the world. Such struggles, however, extend beyond the reach of this paper, which has attempted to limit its detail to the immediate period of Luther and his day. Therefore, the study of the growth of the reform effort must stop at this point.

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The fact that Luther was a man of genius cannot be disputed. He accomplished a great deal during his lifetime, much of it a result of his own character and brilliance. The fact that God was aiding Luther greatly also cannot be disputed. For Luther had faced the might of the Roman Church and lived, whereas many previous reform-minded men, such as Huss, had forfeited their lives in their efforts. The fact that much of Luther's success came from his close association with the rulers of Germany, association more through correspondence and influence than personal contact, has been pointed out by this paper.

The contact Luther had with the leaders of the empire was no accident, nor was it incidental to his work. As Schwartz states in Luther and His Times,

...it is significant how intimate was the contact between Luther and important men all over Europe.... It is amazing that Luther, a busy professor, town pastor, civic leader, and author, was still able to keep his finger on the pulse of Germany. 1

Through such contact Luther was able to draw many other people into the reform movement.

Luther did not only concern himself with the religious features of the Reformation. In his Appeal to the Nobility he spoke for the Saxon court, asking Charles V to assist in throwing off the yoke of Roman dominance of Germany. He also

1 Op. cit., p.3.

asked Charles to reform the Church in Germany, since the pope¹ had refused. Bornkamm says that Luther, in this treatise to the Christian Nobility,

Seized the evil by the roots: the precedence of canonical over civil law. By his restoration of the sovereignty of the state he blazed the trail for the multitude of his own reformational proposals....He set off the deutsche Nation from the rest of the Christians. 2

To Luther a nation was a group of people that was held together by the firm structure of the state. It was the will of God that determined the relationship between the people and the ruler, so the duties of both should flow from God's³ law.

Because of the connection between the people and the state Luther found no difficulty in asking the princes for assistance in the reform effort. The Church of his time needed reform because it forced the people to believe its dogmas, and so, as Blayney says, "In the case of an emergency in the Church, the civil government is justified, even obligated, as Luther saw it, to further the reform of the Church, for this is its Christian duty."⁴ The help, then, that Luther received from the princes was not just incidental assistance that happened to come his way. In many cases he

1 Ibid., p.5.

2 Bornkamm, op. cit., p.223.

3 Ibid., p.242.

4 Op. cit., p.250.

asked for it.

Support came to Luther from many sides, from the people, from God, from the princes - all of it necessary. Perhaps not everyone who supported him really knew what the reform effort was all about, but they knew Luther was a champion for Germany, a man they felt would lead them away from the tyranny of Rome. Schwiebert says,

All the German princes, including even his bitter enemy Duke George, agreed with Luther in the belief that it was high time for the Diet to consider and act upon the Gravamina....As the reports of Aleander also indicate, many of the princes and even the counselors of the emperor saw in Luther an opportunity to bring about economic and political changes long since overdue. ¹

So whether the support was given because of religious, or social, or political, or economic reasons, the people of Germany were in favor of reform against Rome, the Church and the politician.

It was true that not all princes favored the reform movement. For example, Dukes Wilhelm and Ludwig of Bavaria actually persecuted Protestants of any kind and tried to rule all heresy out of their land. ² The general situation of Europe, and of Germany in particular, was such, though, that many of the princes were going to use Luther and his reform effort to get rid of Rome and its influence on Germany.

Luther came at an opportune time in history. That was the will of God. That he was able to accomplish much in the

¹ Op. cit., p.7.

² Gerald Strauss, "The Religious Policies of Dukes Wilhelm and Ludwig of Bavaria," Church History, XXVIII (December, 1959), no.4.

face of such a powerful foe as the Roman Church was, to a great extent, the result of the support given him by the secular powers of the world. Frederick the Wise only did for Luther what he thought he owed any citizen of his territory, and yet that was enough to keep Luther alive and give him the chance to continue his work for the Church. The other princes of the realm could have refused to face the possibility of war by not standing up for their faith in defense of the Reformation, but they chose to support reform and Luther.

As Walker says of the early efforts of Luther, if he had not had the support of the prince of Saxony, he would have died a martyr's death very early in life.¹ Time and again men had tried to oppose the strength of Rome, but none had been successful. Luther did and was successful, because he was aware of the help that could be gotten from the rulers of Germany, he did not fear to seek that help, and he got that help. Without it he more than likely would not have achieved the great success of the Reformation that is attributed to him. The tremendous efforts, both militarily and otherwise, as have been pointed out above, to get rid of Luther and his teachings would have been successful if he had stood alone. The adoption of the Reformation cause by the princes of Germany assured its continuation.

¹ Op. cit., p.311.

God had used a man to start the much-needed reform of the Church, but when the scope of the reform extended beyond the reach of one man, He provided men to carry on the effort.

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