MARTIN LUTHER: FATHER OF FREEDOM OR
FATHER OF AUTHORITARIANISM

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Denton, Texas
August 1978
Mays, Gladys Dezell, Martin Luther: Father of Freedom or Father of Authoritarianism, Master of Arts (History), August 1978, 119 pp., bibliography, 33 titles.

This thesis endeavors to reveal that Martin Luther's dogmatic adherence to one absolute interpretation of the Word of God restricted man's freedom, both religious and personal. His intolerant and authoritarian attitude toward individualistic groups, called into existence by his polemics stressing Christian freedom, is broadly discussed. Luther's theology denied man responsibility for his salvation, either through works, the exercise of divine reason, or through living a lifestyle in the imitation of Christ, leaving man with the inability to accept responsibility for his actions. The authoritarian religions that developed after Luther brought confusion and indifference regarding the nature of religion, leaving modern man in search of alternate authorities in which to place his faith and assume responsibility for his actions, thereby limiting his independence and freedom.
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INTRODUCTION

Intolerance is a state of mind found among esoteric and ideological realms of thought and also in fundamentalist and less intellectual bodies of thought, subscribed to by men who believe they have arrived at absolute truth, who consider any deviation from their absolutes to be heretical and a threat to the whole fabric of society. Martin Luther was such a man.

Intolerance is neither inherent in nor peculiar to any particular age, society, or institution. It existed in ancient times and in primitive societies, in both secular and religious institutions, and it still exists in these same divisions of society today. All of our religious, scientific, political, and educational systems are permeated with intolerance, as are most aspects of modern society. Thus, it is clear that sixteenth-century reformers had no monopoly on intolerance.

In its most pernicious state, intolerance is found where both the religious and secular segments of society have become so intimately aligned that any deviance becomes an offence against both church and state. State authorities then can be used to protect their subjects from any elements within the system that they deem to be dangerous, even in matters of faith. In essence, this was the situation that developed
in Germany after Martin Luther's revolt from the Roman Catholic church. This close alignment between church and state was not unknown, but it was a new idea to European society, and soon spread to the whole of Western Europe.

Martin Luther has often mistakenly been considered a prime mover in the emergence of religious freedom, based on theological and social ideas he espoused immediately after his break with the Roman church. Luther was never a tolerant man, even before his break with the papacy, and it was never his intent to champion the cause of religious freedom for the individual man. Of peasant origin and disciplined as a monk, Luther had been conditioned by his environment to think in terms of obedience to lawfully constituted authority, and from this belief he never deviated.

Luther's revolt did not encourage religious freedom on either side of the controversy. Indeed, with the advent of Luther's challenge to papal authority, the flourishing growth of intellectual freedom that had been tolerated within the confines of the medieval church was abruptly terminated. After the Council of Trent, The Catholic dogma became just as narrow and rigid as that of the Protestants. Neither side was willing to permit any type of intellectual or speculative religious thought. Both sides were equally diligent in reviving long dormant Roman laws that allowed them to persecute all who disagreed with or deviated from their stated doctrine.
Within the confines of the Roman Catholic community, within the Church itself, there developed, during the late medieval era, widely divergent theological schools of thought, all concerned with improving or reforming the existing institution. These groups were indulged by the Church, if not encouraged. The Church was inclined to indulge these independent, speculative thinkers so long as they stayed within the framework of accepted church doctrine and presented no challenge to church authority or the fundamental principles upon which the medieval edifice had been built.

Within the Church itself, scholastics had long held widely varying and opposing points of view. Theologians such as Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, and St. Thomas Aquinas held entirely different viewpoints from those of Duns Scotus and William of Occam, with regard to the competence of reason, as opposed to faith, in determining theological questions. Occam denied the efficacy of reason in determining matters of faith, divine reason being beyond the concept of human rationality. These scholars also differed about and questioned the issues of original sin, predestination, and free will, feeling that the Scriptures often lacked clarity on these subjects, and turned to the church fathers for clarification, and to the pope as final authority. All such speculation was kept well within the bounds or limits the Church could accept and did not disturb the loyal adherents to Christendom.

Outside the edifice of the Church itself, other elements of society were lending their intellectual acumen to determine
the proper way for man to live the Christian life and to achieve salvation. The Christian mystics and brotherhoods, such as the Brethren of Common Life, concentrated their efforts entirely on matters of salvation and redemption. While not openly critical of the Church, and making no challenge to papal authority, they found little merit in its system for their purpose and tended to ignore it as a means of reaching their goal of personal salvation.

Christian humanists, on the other hand, approached reform of the Church from a different perspective. To the humanists, Christianity was essentially an ethical approach to living the Christian life; therefore, they were interested in improving both the religious and moral conditions in the existing Church. They placed great emphasis on the exegesis of the Bible, becoming acutely aware of the contrast between Biblical Christianity and Christianity as exemplified by the contemporary Roman church. They disliked the non-essential formalism that has become attached to the medieval church, and attacked the veneration of relics, the rites and ceremonies, because they felt they served no useful purpose for salvation, and tended to obscure the Gospel. Critical though they were at times (even Erasmus had been put on the Index), still they stayed within the accepted limits set by the Church and were allowed a great amount of latitude in their speculative and analytical writings. All these groups remained good Catholics and caused little concern to the Church, for they had
long been tolerated. Then along came Luther and the Church's tolerant attitude toward speculative inquiry came to an abrupt end.

Life was harsh for most segments of society in the years just preceding the Reformation. Plague, pestilence, and famine were widespread. Common men, loyal Catholics, found themselves estranged from the loving God offered to them by the Church. The angry, judgmental, and righteous God dictated by their environment held more credence for them. This era might be called an "age of longing" for the security of a caring, loving God. It was among these people that Luther had lived, and it was among them that his message found its most fertile ground.

Luther's theological development, his estrangement from the Roman church, and his attitude toward religious freedom, can only be understood in light of his "longing" to merit the love of God and to be at peace with that angry and righteous God. Luther tried all the proven methods of the Church to win God's favor and was never able to feel with any certitude that he had succeeded. It was only through his own exegesis of the Bible that he resolved his conflict with God, and upon this basis he founded his absolute theological truths, which would lead him to endeavor to establish the one, true, holy, Christian church, and which would change the structure of the political world.
Luther's theological development was neither sudden nor impulsive; it was a gradual process that led him to question basic dogmas of the Church, just as those preceding him had done. Luther, too, was given latitude to work out his incertitude within the framework of the system. As he progressed in his exegesis, he arrived at the conclusion that salvation comes to man through faith alone, made available only through God's divine grace, exemplified through Christ's redeeming love. In this experience lay man's freedom. Man could not even merit faith, for God chose where he desired to bestow divine grace. Faith was a freely given gift from God to the elect. It was no longer necessary to work toward salvation, because salvation had already been achieved or denied through divine grace. The sacraments, therefore, were necessary only as aids to faith, but were no aid to the achievement of salvation. God saved man entirely and forever, or not at all.

The Gospel contained all guidance to divine truth. It was the responsibility of the individual, through faith and individual conscience, to seek divine guidance and grace through the Scriptures.

These were the main areas in which Luther differed from previous critics of the Roman church. The others were not authoritarian, because they had not arrived at absolute truth; they were searchers for truth. The medievalists did believe there were eternal truths, but they were speculative and unwilling to define them. Luther had arrived at the truth.
and he assumed there could only be one truth; that all right-minded men would arrive at the same truth. Luther assumed a very authoritarian attitude. He proclaimed the eternal truth from God, believing himself and his followers to be instruments of a divine mission, called to restore the true Church and Gospel to the correct state from which the Catholic church had deviated.

As man had no control over his election to grace, so he had no free will over matters pertaining to his salvation. Luther abolished the sacramental system as a means of salvation: the basis on which the Roman system had existed. Since works were of no avail or merit, it followed that monasticism was an unnecessary, useless tool to achieve salvation. The absence of necessity to work for salvation in no way gave the individual license to live in sin and sloth. The duty of a Christian man, according to Luther's theology, was to work for the good of his neighbor out of Christian love. This was faith working through love, serving your fellow man, and could be done in the secular realm just as faithfully as in the spiritual realm, because all callings were sacred and divinely ordained. The laity were just as important in God's plan as the clergy. Since the clergy was no longer needed to help achieve salvation, Luther had destroyed the need for the ecclesiastical hierarchy that had grown up during the Middle Ages.
Still, Luther kept much of the Roman Catholic dogma. One of the fundamental elements in his theology was that of man's natural depravity, because of Original Sin, from which he could be freed only through the gift of God's divine grace. The most heretical sin of all to Luther was to believe that man could achieve anything by himself without the aid of divine grace. Luther held tenaciously to two of the sacraments, even though he had declared, in the beginning, that they were only signs and had no efficacy of their own without attendant faith. Even though Luther agreed that faith must be present during the sacrament of baptism for it to be effective, he held to the traditional view of infant baptism, on the premise that the infant received faith during the ritual of the sacrament. He rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation in the sacrament of the Eucharist, but maintained that the sacrament was more than just a sign or symbol, that Christ was truly present during the sacrament. To Luther, the presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament substantiated the truth he found in the Gospel, that Christ had died for man's sins. Retaining, or rather restoring, the dogma of the Trinity reaffirmed his belief in the deity of Christ, and confirmed God's love through the mediation of his divine Son.

In order to understand Luther's reaction to his opponents' failure to accept and adhere to his authoritarian truths, as he had formulated them, it is necessary to understand his
idea of the role of Satan in the world. To Luther, Satan was as real as God. They were ever constant adversaries for the soul of man. Satan was ever present in the world, never at rest, often clothed in corporeal form. As Luther was God's chosen instrument in this world, it was his duty to oppose Satan in every way possible. Since through the Gospel and God's divine grace Luther had arrived at absolute truth, there was no room for compromise with Satan. Therefore, when others presented ideas that differed from his own truths, Satan certainly had inspired them. Whether it was the pope, Zwingli, Munzer, or the Anabaptists that Luther was admonishing or persecuting, the real enemy was always Satan.

From this vantage point, then, Luther, acting as God's agent, could under no circumstances countenance religious freedom in any form that differed from his own theological truths. Luther could only think in terms of absolutes. The Gospel was not debatable. There was no middle way. Either man was a Christian through the grace of God, an instrument of God, or he suffered God's wrath and was the instrument of the devil, a corrupter of souls. Luther made neutrality impossible. He felt that by attacking his opponents' positions, he was demonstrating God's love. By pointing out their error, he was evidencing the responsibility he felt for their salvation. Once they were shown and accepted his truth, they would be free.
CHAPTER I

LUTHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

From the beginning of his career Luther was by nature "less tolerant than the pope,"¹ and less inclined to compromise. His revolt against the Roman hierarchy began with no conscious theory that all men should have the right to determine their own religious doctrines. Freedom of conscience was for Luther, a personal experience, growing out of his own personal religious experience. His actions against both pope and emperor were not instigated as a plea for individual religious liberty for private individuals, but in the conviction that he was right, that his teachings agreed with the Word of God in the Bible, the only authority he was willing to accept. He adamantly declared that his reception of the Gospel had been received from heaven rather than from man.²

His brief, so-called liberal period after Worms stemmed strictly from self-interest and political impotency. Protected in the Wartburg from Imperial and papal retribution, he was free to suggest ideas that appealed to the people, by confirming in a religious form what people already believed in


a social and economic way. From this secure vantage point he could safely attack the papacy without fear of repercussion, but immobility hampered his activities as an active reformer. His safety assured by the overwhelming support he found among the princes, when Luther attained the power to persecute deviates, he did so without hesitancy, promulgating the state as his agency to keep his truth pure.

Bainton cites three characteristics that typify those who are inclined toward persecution of others. First of all, a persecutor believes he is right. Secondly, he considers his tenet to be extremely important. And last, he thinks the situation can be resolved by coercion. On all three counts Martin Luther accurately fits this definition of a persecutor, and as his status moved from the position of dissenting heretic to the builder of an Evangelical church system, he consistently moved against anyone who dissented from the meaning that he had derived from the Scriptures.

Five stages are apparent in Luther's attitude toward those who held opinions that differed from his. Before 1517 Luther completely accepted all the Roman Catholic tenets and had complete confidence in the Roman system. His early theological works and sermons were harsh and uncompromising toward both heretic and Jew, who he equated with the infidel.

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1. Turks. Becoming disenchanted with certain practices of the Church, from the publication of his Ninety-five Theses until his excommunication and banishment in 1521, Luther directed his polemics toward church abuses and excesses of the papacy, which ultimately culminated in his announcing the pope to be Antichrist.6

Luther's so-called liberal era, wherein he gave lip-service to freedom of conscience and denial of force in acceptance of the new faith, was brief, and held sway only while he was still endangered and powerless. Other than a few moderating comments, particularly in relation to his hope for Jewish conversions, all of his actions and sermons were delivered in self-interest, pitting his calm, moderate views in opposition to the radicals that were disrupting the reform. At this point Luther began to focus on his own role, his character as an instrument of God, making the Reformation a Lutheran cause.7 There was really very little change in his basic attitude toward religious freedom, and he


6Martin Luther, Luther's Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters, ed. and trans. Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1918), 1:304. (Hereinafter cited as Correspondence.)

would repudiate this moderation when he gained a certain amount of power. Luther quickly changed to a more conservative stance when he became aware that other men could hold interpretations of the Gospel that differed from his own. To do so, in Luther's mind, was the same as rebelling against God. Any liberal spirit that may have been prevalent in his mind completely ended with the Peasant's revolt of 1525, when he realized that his ideas concerning freedom, which he had intended as spiritual freedom only, had been accepted literally to mean physical freedom from bondage, thereby upsetting the socio-political structure. It had never been Luther's intent to promote individual freedom.

From 1525 through 1530, attempting to develop an Evangelical church system, a task he was ill equipped to accomplish, his theological concepts having centered on a church invisible, rather than structural organization, Luther found himself besieged on all sides by conflicting religious attitudes. Not only at war with Roman Catholicism, but also with multitudinous diverse Protestant sects, each professing its own version of Scriptural interpretation, his already hardening attitude became completely uncompromising, calling first for banishment, then eventually the death penalty for all who did not accept his teachings.

Moses in his law commands that such blasphemers and indeed all false teachers should be stoned . . . . So, in this case, there is not much to be disputing;
but such open blasphemers should be condemned without a hearing and without defense.  

At some point Luther's theology, which stressed man's lack of free will and the necessity of obedience to authority, and his dogmatic position on the complete depravity of the nature of man, conflicted with views held by other sects. Luther had no intention of letting God's people be infiltrated and corrupted by their false teachings. He called upon the state to enforce religious conformity, bringing about that union of church and state that was to have lasting impact on most western European institutions.

After the German princes assumed control of the church, the authoritarianism of Lutheranism became evident in the church organization and in education, through the invocation of visitation ordinances, instigated at Luther's insistence. The role of the aging Luther was diminished from that of the dynamic young reformer, but he still played an influential role as dean of the Wittenberg theological faculty. Luther was, in effect, the ultimate authority in questions dealing with doctrine and ecclesiastical matters. His main contribution was to defend his theology and his church through his polemical writings. Feeling his Gospel threatened on all sides, he lashed out indiscriminately,

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8Luther's Works, 13:62.

often without logic, promoting old superstitions, against Catholic, Jew, Anabaptist, or Sacramentarian. All of the sectaries were considered to be heretics, led by Satan. His polemical writings against the papacy and the Jews in the final years of his life were savage and coarse, demanding expulsion and deportation.\textsuperscript{10}

Luther's early theological writings and lectures followed the medieval church patterns of thought, with harsh statements against heretics, apostates, Turks, and especially against the unregenerate Jews, who had failed to take the advantage that God intended by their fall, to bring them to recognize the righteousness of Christ.\textsuperscript{11} His medievalism was most apparent when he reaffirmed the superstition, prevalent among the people, that the Jews willingly murdered in order to adhere to their own religion.\textsuperscript{12} Heretics, to Luther and the Roman church were even more dangerous than unbelievers, because they endangered the social order, a view that was to be shared later by the Lutheran community.\textsuperscript{13} So strongly did Luther accept the authority and truth of the Roman system, he declared himself willing to add fagots to Jon Hus' funeral pyre.\textsuperscript{14} Later as he studying Hus' writings, Luther would


\textsuperscript{11}Lectures on Romans, 18:5. \textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 97.

\textsuperscript{13}Bainton, \textit{Travail}, p. 17.

declare many of them to be evangelical; that is, they contained views with which Luther agreed.\textsuperscript{15}

Luther was by nature inclined to be uncompromising. A medieval man, shaped by the medieval environment, disciplined as a monk, he was conditioned to be conservative and obedient to authority. Until 1517 this obedience included the authority of the Roman church, but as he developed his theology, especially regarding the manner of achieving grace, Luther began to question the basis of that authority. Unable to satisfy himself that authority existed in the decretals or canon law, he began to challenge the authority of the institution. When the indulgence controversy came along, Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses, which were factual and authoritarian, but not heretical. Traditionally a scholar would attempt to prove his theses correct. Luther put the burden of proof on the Church to prove him wrong, thereby reversing the roles of authority.

Deliberately provoked by John Eck at the Leipzig Debate, Luther's interpretation of theology forced him to deny the primacy and divinity of the Roman papacy and of councils, the authenticity of papal decretals, and the authority of either pope or council to establish new articles of faith. Asked if he considered the entire church except for himself to be in error, Luther replied:

\footnote{Bainton, \textit{Here I Stand}, p. 89.}
I am a Christian theologian; and I am bound, not only to assert, but to defend the truth with my blood and death. I want to believe freely and be a slave to the authority of no one, whether council, university, or pope. I will confidently confess what appears to me to be true, whether it has been asserted by a Catholic or a heretic, whether it has been approved or reproved by a council.\textsuperscript{16}

Luther's conscience would not let him compromise. He had renounced all authority in favor of freedom of conscience. The final break was irreparable and excommunication followed shortly.

Luther now began a battle with the papacy that only ended with his death. He was now definitely convinced that the pope was the Antichrist.\textsuperscript{17} In his polemical pamphlet, addressed to the German nobility, he appealed to their national sentiment to correct episcopal abuses, and "not permit their land and people to be so sadly robbed and ruined."\textsuperscript{18} In this pamphlet Luther outlined his theology, and his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which appears, on the surface, to be a leveling process among the sectors of society, stressing "that all Christians are truly of the 'spiritual estate,' and there is among them no difference at all except that of office. . . ."

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., pp. 90-92.

\textsuperscript{17}Correspondence, Luther to Spalatin, July 17, 1520, 1:366.


\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 14.
In reality, this work was a deliberate, calculated effort to get the people to separate from the Roman church. It was intended to drive a wedge between the German state and the Roman church. For reasons of their own, Luther found many of the German princes receptive to his cause.

Luther's work dealing with Christian liberty had the appearance of freeing man from authority. In actuality it only substituted the authority of Luther's Gospel of faith for that of the Roman church. It merely differentiated between the spiritually free and non-free; the free were still in bondage to Luther's authoritarian faith, a nebulous concept, not easily defined. Its meaning was misunderstood and Luther's declaration that "A Christian man is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none," would have unsuspected, and for Luther and the Reformation, undesirable consequences. Luther's advocacy of Christian liberty was the most modern element in his thought. Effective in undermining the authority of the Roman church, liberty came to stand for freedom from all authority, and became the byword of the emerging modern era.

By attacking the sacramental system of the Church, denying its efficacy in achieving salvation, Luther destroyed the reason for existence of the ecclesiastical system built

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21 McGiffert, p. 31.
up over the centuries. With salvation through God's grace a present reality, the sacraments were only aids to faith, not a means of salvation. Luther held only three of the sacraments to have any Scriptural validity, "baptism, penance, and the bread." Later he dispensed with penance as a sacrament, because it depended on works and works were incidental to salvation. Luther's insistence on the "real presence" of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist would bring conflict between not only Catholic and Protestant, but also between Protestant and Protestant. On this issue hinged the unity of the Protestant churches, and it was because of their failure to agree on this issue that the Reformation failed.

The outcome of Luther's trial at Worms was almost predictable. He wrote to Emperor Charles V in an attempt to explain his position and the obstinancy he had encountered in dealing with the papacy. "I strove for nothing other than spreading the truth of the gospel against superstitious opinions stemming from human tradition. . . .I vainly suggest conditions for peace, I vainly request to be informed of teachings more correct than mine." He declared his intent to refuse to go if he were being called merely to recant.

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23 Luther's Works, Luther to Emperor Charles V, August 30, 1520, 48:178.

24 Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 139.
True to his word, he refused to recant because that would be acting against his conscience and divine truth.25 "He also said he would not recant any part of his writings until he was refuted and overcome by one who understood the gospel better than he did."26 Since Luther acknowledged no authority superior to his own interpretation of the Gospel, the results were a foregone conclusion. Here once more Luther reversed the traditional positions of authority; he should have been in the position of proving that he was right to the satisfaction of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Luther left Worms with the knowledge that he had the support of a large sector of the populace. His polemics had done their job well. Returning to Wittenberg after a year of seclusion at Castle Wartburg because "Satan has intruded into my fold. . . ."27 Luther was forced to assert his authority, declaring himself an instrument of God, in order to turn the Reformation into more conservative channels. Fearing that the rapid changes being initiated with little thought for the consequences would hinder his cause, Luther preached a cautious course. However, he was unwilling to let anyone make changes without his approval. Freedom of thought and action could only be aligned with Luther's private precepts.

25 Correspondence, Aleander to Vice-Chancellor Cardinal de Medici at Rome, April 18 and 19, 1521, 1:529.

26 Ibid., Jerome De Medici to Francis Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, April 19, 1521, 1:532.

27 Luther's Works, Luther to Elector Frederick, Wittenberg, March 7 or 8, 1522, 48:395.
Disagreement with Luther over the nature of the Eucharist brought about Carlstadt's banishment from Saxony.\textsuperscript{28} While he felt it impossible to compel faith and piety, Luther strongly advocated cessation of "public offences" such as the daily masses supported by the prince.\textsuperscript{29} When the prince failed to act, Luther first warned, then forced the canons to discontinue mass at Castle Church.\textsuperscript{30} Freedom of conscience had been subjected to the will of Luther's Gospel.

Luther achieved some reputation for tolerance as a result of propaganda tactics developed in an attempt to convert Jews to his Gospel. He wrote a poignant pamphlet entitled \textit{That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew}, in which he blamed the Roman church teachings for failure to convert Jews to Christianity.\textsuperscript{31} He accused them of having "dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings."\textsuperscript{32} Luther pleaded that they be dealt with as brothers in hope of converting them. Although Luther was sincere in his effort, he was attacking the papacy as much as defending the Jews.

Christian mildness and courtesy were dispensed with when dealing with those who openly opposed his Gospel. Luther was


\textsuperscript{29}Correspondence, Luther to Spalatin, January 2, 1523, 2:154.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., Luther to the Canons of Wittenberg, November 17, 1524, 2:261.

\textsuperscript{31}Luther's Works, 45:200.  \textsuperscript{32}Ibid.
so confident of his interpretation of the Gospel that he would allow no other interpretation. Acting as God's instrument, Luther's "true doctrine" was not debatable, since his authority came from heaven.

And I wish to assure you and declare to you frankly and openly that he who heeds me in this matter is most certainly heeding not me, but Christ. . . . For I know very well and am quite certain of the content and thrust of what I say and teach; and anyone who will rightly consider my teaching will also discover it for himself.

Reproved by friends who were critical of his caustic writings, Luther replied that even though many criticized and judged his abrasive and cutting tone unfavorably, "the judgment of future generations will be better."34 Even the gentle Staupitz chided Luther for condemning mere externals that had little to do with faith and placed no burden on the conscience.

Why, therefore, should simple hearts be disturbed, and why should the monastic garb be a stench in your nostrils, when many wear it in the holy faith of Christ? . . . Please do not condemn what is indifferent and can exist along with sincere faith.35

Luther's doctrine did not allow for compromise or debate. "My work is not that of one who can take a middle course."36 Besides, anyone who approached his teaching with

33Ibid., p. 348. 34Ibid., 48:170.
35Correspondence, Staupitz to Luther, April 1, 1524, 2:226.
36Ibid., Luther to an unnamed correspondent, August 28, 1522, 2:134.
a right heart would not be offended by his severity. Luther's authority in determining the truth was exclusive. By June of 1522 Luther was unwilling to allow anyone, including the angels, to judge his doctrine, and declared that all who refused to accept his truth would forfeit salvation. Luther had received his "true doctrine" through the grace of God; thus, God alone was able to judge its validity. Having discarded the sacramental system of the Roman church as the only means of achieving salvation, Luther now substituted his infallible doctrine as the only path to salvation.

Thus, when the Zwickau "prophets" and Thomas Munzer arrived on the scene, preaching a doctrine that was widely contradictory to that of Luther, he was certain that Satan was behind their actions. Authority for their theology was based on direct revelation from God through dreams and visions. Luther instinctively mistrusted anyone who claimed direct revelation from God. He had arrived at his doctrine through insight from the study of Scripture. Revelation was a subjective experience that could not be proven. Luther, thus, "heard nothing said or done by them which Satan could not emulate." Luther disagreed with Munzer and the prophets,

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37 Ibid., p. 133.


39 Correspondence, Luther to Melanchthon, January 13, 1522, 2:84.
not only on the most fundamental elements of Munzer's theology, but in the polemical way in which Munzer presented his doctrine, which was as rigid and uncompromising as Luther's. Munzer proposed to gather a visible community of saints, and anyone not joining them was of the "godless", and subject to extermination. Luther informed the territorial authorities of the presence of these disruptive spirits, warning them that they would have an accounting with God if they permitted those "spirits" to foster rebellion. Ousted from Saxony, Munzer wandered through Germany, where he participated in the Peasants' Rebellion and was executed. Luther was never able to escape the fear of the spirit of Munzer; it arose again in all the dissenting sectaries as he encountered them. Satan was at work in the world. Luther's fear of these radical elements rested not only on theological grounds, but in the belief that all such spirits were naturally seditious.

Luther's work on Christian liberty had been taken literally and seriously by the peasants in Germany. Many assumed that Luther's message that a Christian man was free from the law applied to them, freeing them from bondage to their lords and the Church. Luther had anticipated that right-minded


41 Correspondence, Luther to Elector Frederic and Duke John of Saxony, July, 1524, 2:246.
people would receive his message in the light of spiritual freedom only. When they rose in rebellion, Luther warned they they were acting against natural law, that even if their cause was just and that of the rulers unjust, that "does not excuse disorder and rebellion." They should not have been surprised; this was the same message he had been giving all along regarding obedience to authority, that "no insurrection is ever right, no matter how right the cause it seeks to promote." Luther advised the princes to show them no mercy, because it was obvious "they are faithless, perjured, disobedient, rebellious, thieves, robbers, murderers, and blasphemers." With Luther's approval, the revolt was put down with great savagery on the part of the princes. Since it was done by God's will, Luther felt that the slaughter of so many peasants would "profit many souls."

After the revolt had been quelled, Luther's movement lost much of its popular appeal. Men found that the Gospel was less democratic and contained less freedom than they had been led to believe by Luther's writings. Luther's Gospel taught absolute submission to all authority, both secular and evangelical, and the endurance of worldly evils. Christians, if necessary, were meant to suffer injustice, by the will of God.

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42Luther's Works, 46:25. 43Ibid., p. 63
44Ibid., p. 74.
45Correspondence, Luther to John Ruhel at Mansfeld, May 23, 1525, 2:318.
Luther's attitude toward all dissenters became more rigid after the rebellion. Humanists, as well as the lower elements, turned away from the Lutheran movement, some returning to the Roman church, others toward more radical sects, none of which allowed much freedom of conscience. Luther's new Elector adhered to the Evangelical faith and quite willingly followed Luther's advice to deal more aggressively with all non-conformists. Wide differences existed between their beliefs, but Luther was inclined to regard all left-wing dissenters as one group, and feared them more than the Catholics. "All the sectaries think they are a hundred times wiser than I, and do not listen to me. I am more at war with them than with the pope." 46

Zwingli and the Sacramentarians had accepted most of Luther's doctrine, differing most strongly over the nature of the Eucharist. Luther contended that Zwingli deserved "holy hatred, so insolently and unworthily does he deal with the word of God. The Hyperaspites I have not yet read; and why should I read it." 47 Neither had he read Erasmus nor the Sacramentarians, although he inveighed against their error with all his authority.

46 Ibid., Luther to William Pravest at Kiel, March 14, 1528, 2:433.

47 Ibid., Luther to Melanchthon in Jena, October 27, 1527, 2:419.
Until 1528 Luther had not "given much thought to these
baptizers."48 "The error of the Anabaptists is more toler-
able than that of the Sacramentarians. For the Sacramentarians
altogether destroy baptism, while the Anabaptists give it
another character."49 However, he soon influenced his Elec-
tor to suppress the writings of both sects, and insisted on
the banishment of "false prophets."50 Luther would allow
only one kind of preaching in Saxon lands, in order to prevent
dissension. False preachers were to be turned over to the
magistrates. Luther's Gospel demanded that all preachers be
called, and these "false" preachers could not show proof of a
call.51 The Imperial Diet at Speyer in 1529, composed of
both Lutheran and Catholic princes, decreed the death penalty
without trial for Anabaptists. Luther endorsed this policy.
To his followers, Luther had acknowledged two kinds of
heretics: those sinning against civil authority and those
sinning against religion only. The Anabaptists fell into
both groups and were to be severely punished, but the papists
and Sacramentarians, who sinned against religion only, were
not to be tolerated either. 52 To Luther, church and political
communities had become so entwined that opposition to religion

50William A. Mueller, Church and State in Luther and
51Luther's Works, 13:66.
52Correspondence, Viet Dietrich to Lazarus Spengler at
Nuremberg, March 1530, 2:525.
had become a state offense. Blasphemy had become equated with sedition. By 1535 Luther would prefer execution to banishment, which merely "spread the infection elsewhere."\(^5\)

During the fourth decade of the century, the aged Luther, embittered that the Reformation as he had envisioned it had failed, bitterly lashed out at all his enemies with all the viciousness of a tormented mind. The papacy and the Jews were particularly singled out in his crude polemics. He accused the papacy of almost every possible perversion, while the bishops failed to fulfill their office and lived like "Epicureans and sows."\(^5\) "The pope lies in his own filth, and thus one finds out that his rule and rank comes neither from God nor man, but from all the devils in hell."\(^5\)

Luther, however, would not dream of judging or punishing him either, except to say that he was born from the behind of the devil, is full of devils, lies, blasphemy and idolatry; is the instigator of these things, God's enemy, Antichrist, desolator of Christendom, church-robber, key-thief, brothel-keeper, steward of Sodom; and everything else that was said above. But this is not a verdict, judgment, or condemnation.\(^5\)

With the Jews, Luther was even less restrained. His tract dismayed even his own followers, and was hardly what one would expect from the man who had called for brotherly love in 1523. Luther advocated harsh measures for the unregenerated Jews, whom he believed to be proselytizing among

\(^{53}\)Mueller, p. 66. \(^{54}\)Luther's Works. 41:211.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., p. 344. \(^{56}\)Ibid., p. 363.
the Christians in Bohemia.\textsuperscript{57} Convinced of the impossibility of converting the Jews, Luther recommended burning their synagogues, destroying their homes, abolishing their safeconduct in the territory, and "then eject them forever from the country."\textsuperscript{58}

Essentially Luther had changed very little in his attitude toward those who did not share his Gospel. The young theologian in the Roman church had been just as rigid, although the old Luther was less scholarly in his opposition, and recommended stronger measures to deal with his enemies. They both held the same views toward Jews and heretics, and both held the same reverence for civil authority. Neither were advocates of religious freedom. Luther was bound by his infallible Gospel and bound all who followed him to accept his interpretation. Unable to countenance the idea that opposing faiths could live harmoniously within the same area, Luther gave up the leadership of the movement for religious freedom in favor of trying to reclaim the medieval dream of a united Christendom. The forces he had set in motion rendered that dream impossible, and forced all Christendom into opposing camps, each claiming to have the truth. Man was forced to accept the Lutheran faith or Catholicism, or else remain a wanderer, subject to persecution by the authorities. The movement which started out to spread the Gospel of God's love, ended in spreading the gospel of force and coercion.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 47:60.  \textsuperscript{58}Ibid., p. 272.
CHAPTER II

LUTHER AND THE ROMAN CHURCH

The fundamental difference between Luther and the Roman Catholic church centered on the nature and source of religious authority. Luther, through his concept of the priesthood of all believers, taught that all Christians were entitled to perform the same functions that the sacerdotal system had bestowed only on its own clergy in the hierarchical structure. Though the duties of the clergy were, indeed, of a special nature, those of teaching God's Word to the laity, to Luther this office was not to be esteemed more highly than any other office. Nor did this office delegate to the clergy the power to bestow salvation on mankind in the future. Salvation was a present reality, conferred directly on those to whom God chose to extend his redeeming grace. Enlightenment came through the study of God's Word in Scripture.

Luther posited the Word of God as the sole authority in matters of religion, as opposed to canon law and the decretals of the Roman church. The Word of God, thought Luther, could be divined by any right-minded individual, whereas the canons and decretales took a professional caste to interpret them. Luther was a man of tremendous scholarship, had a great gift for polemics, a charismatic and dynamic personality. He
pulled together the medieval ideology he already knew to exist and made it meaningful in a new situation. Luther promoted two incompatible concepts, the idea of freedom and the necessity for unquestioning obedience to authority. One became the battlecry of the modern world; the other became the basis of the modern state.

Luther's theology of salvation through God's divine grace alone was not new. The early Church had accepted this thought from Paul and it had always held a place in their official doctrine. At the same time the Church had taught that through the efficacy of the sacraments man could achieve grace, and by living a virtuous life, would receive God's salvation in the next world. Nor were predestination and the idea of the elect new ideas. Augustine had fully formulated these doctrines, and both John Wycliff and Jon Hus had preached this doctrine. This old dogma was accepted as a system of laws, but had lain dormant, for all practical purposes, since Augustine. Emphasis had been placed on man's own responsibility in his relationship with God.

Luther restored the old dogma, stripped away the embellishments of the sacramental system, and presented it as a new idea. For Luther, the core of religion lay in his personal religious experience; reason could play no part in the theology he developed. Having arrived at the one truth, his

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singular approach to formulating his doctrine was subjective and non-rational. God revealed only one truth. All right-minded men must see the same truth. Luther's dogmatism and intolerance toward those who did not accept his truth, outweighed the "newness" in his teachings. Luther's authoritarianism led him to stress that the act of believing was more important than what one believed. Thus, from the very beginning, Luther placed the quarrel with the Church on a dogmatic level. As he formulated his "new" Gospel, Luther placed the burden of proof of his ideas on the Church, and challenged the Church to prove him wrong. Freedom lay only in the acceptance of his doctrines.

Luther's authority for his theology was the Word of God as interpreted by Luther. As he read and expounded the Scriptures, Luther became convinced that the Word of God had been corrupted through the officials of the Church, that contemporary Catholicism was "the product of an evil dissent from the Christian Gospel."² Luther used the techniques and knowledge of the humanists, in a sharper and more dogmatic manner, to put forth his ideas. He accused the pope and the Roman hierarchy of abominations, corruption, and failure to lead their flocks to the true worship of God.³ He still felt the authority of the Church to be paramount and to be obeyed in all instances. The Church, Luther declared,

³Lectures on Romans, p. 292.
... cannot err in proclaiming the faith, only the individual within her is liable to error. But let him beware of differing from the Church, for the Church's leaders are the walls of the church and our fathers; they are the eye of the body, and in them we must see the light.  

Luther thought that even Rome would be receptive to his Gospel, once correctly informed. The Word of God would reform the Church. Instead, he was called upon to recant by both pope and emperor.

During the later Middle Ages, the Church had allowed a certain amount of latitude to intellectuals speculating about theology and the nature of the visible Church. This they had done without attacking the authority on which the ecclesiastical structure rested. In the medieval world one could criticize the Church visible without challenging the authority of the Church. Luther's Ninety-five Theses, factual and authoritarian, drew a line between the Church visible and the Church invisible, and all except what he believed fell into the Church visible, and only over the Church visible did the pope have power. The pope responded to this challenge to his authority by summoning Luther to be heard before the papal legate, Cardinal Cajetan, at the Imperial Diet at Augsburg in 1518. Luther had written the pope that he would be willing to submit unconditionally to his authority. "I shall acknowledge your voice as the voice of the

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Christ who is enthroned in you and who speaks through you. If I merit death, I shall not refuse to die."\(^5\)

The cardinal threatened Luther with excommunication if he refused to recant. Luther replied that he would recant if his conscience permitted. "But I know that neither the command nor the advice nor the influence of anyone ought to make me do anything against conscience or can do so."\(^6\)

Luther challenged the Church to prove him wrong, asserting "I will willingly recant any article proved to me to be erroneous."\(^7\)

Luther now declared his intention to "act in earnest against the Pope and Roman arrogance."\(^8\) He still claimed to honor the pope above all except Christ; however, he would prefer the Word of Christ "to the words of his vicar, and have no doubt that we should judge all the words and deeds of the vicar by his words."\(^9\) Luther declared that it had never been his intent to break away from the "apostolic Roman see. . . . But I act for my faith in Christ, that they may


\(^6\)Preserved Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, W., 1911), p. 52.

\(^7\)Correspondence, Luther to the Elector Frederic of Saxony, January 19, 1519, 1:153.

\(^8\)Ibid., Luther to Christopher Scheurl at Nuremberg, February 20, 1519, 1:166.

\(^9\)Ibid., Luther to Peter Lupinus and Andrew Carlstadt, January, 1519, 1:158.
not treat his Word as they please, and contaminate it."\(^{10}\)

By March 1519, Luther suspected that the pope might be the Antichrist, "so terribly is Christ, that is, the truth, corrupted and crucified by him in the decretals."\(^{11}\) At Leipzig in 1519 he would deny the divinity of the pope's authority, declaring that the Bible and early church history contradicted this myth.\(^{12}\) Asserting his authority, he asserted "we should put more faith in one man who has the Bible for him, than in the Pope and a whole council without the Bible."\(^{13}\)

Pope Leo replied to this challenge to his authority by issuing the papal bull declaring Luther heretical for teaching doctrines not endorsed by the Church; excommunication was to follow if he refused to recant within sixty days. Luther's works were to be confiscated and burned. Luther retaliated by burning theological works of the papacy and the decretals, and threw in the papal bull along with them, thus closing off any opportunity of negotiation. Students at the University of Wittenberg were invited to the burning, by the following bulletin:

All who adhere to evangelical truth are asked to come to the Chapel of the Holy Cross, outside the gates of the city, and meet there at nine o'clock this morning. At that time the godless papal

\(^{10}\)Ibid., Luther to George Spalatin, March 5, 1519, 1:167.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., Luther to George Spalatin, March 13, 1519, 1:170.


\(^{13}\)Correspondence, Luther and Carlstadt to the Elector Frederic, August 19, 1519, 1:214.
constitutions and writings of the scholastics will be burned according to ancient, indeed apostolic custom. This is done because the enemies of the Gospel have stated their intention to burn Luther's pious and evangelical books. Hurry pious students, and witness this holy and God-pleasing spectacle! Perhaps this is the time when the Antichrist will be revealed.14

Luther and his followers had identified the enemy and dogmatically took their stand against intellectual freedom of inquiry, censoring material they considered to be incompatible with their tenets. Luther attempted to justify his actions by saying:

I would not have ventured such an act unless I had learned to see by experience that the pope and the papal deceivers had erred and deceived. Indeed, although I myself had frequently, but vainly, explained my teaching to them, they were so stubborn in their unchristian errors and their corruption of soul, that, not only would they refuse to be shown or taught, but they even closed their eyes and stopped their ears, blindly condemned the evangelical teaching and consigned it to the flames, as if thus to confirm and preserve their own teaching, which is antichristian and devilish.

Luther alone was the authority on what constituted Christian teachings. He wrote to the penitents who had been forbidden to read his books that "I am fully convinced that my doctrine has come from God."16

Convinced that the pope was Antichrist, Luther appealed to the secular authorities to reform the papacy and "keep

15Woolf, 2:77.
16Ibid., p. 92.
the knaves of Rome from their streets."\(^{17}\)

I will not tolerate it that men should establish new articles of faith and scold, slander, and judge as heretics, schismatics, and unbelievers all other Christians in the whole world only because they are not under the pope.\(^{18}\)

The pope's authority was not of divine origin.\(^{19}\) Luther urged the princes to use their swords against the Romanists.

If we strike thieves with the gallows, robbers with the sword, heretics with fire, why do we not much more attack in arms these masters of perdition, these cardinals, these popes, and all this sink of the Roman Sodom which has without end corrupted the Church of God, and wash our hands in their blood?\(^{20}\)

An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate was an appeal to the self-interest of the German nobles in order to win partisans against the Church. Luther denied that temporal authority fell under the jurisdiction of the spiritual estate and that the pope alone had the authority to interpret Scripture or call a council. In this most egalitarian of all his tracts, Luther introduced his concept of the priesthood of all believers, breaking down the distinction between the clergy and the laity, insisting that there were no differences between the spiritual and temporal estates except that of office.\(^{21}\) "For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can

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\(^{17}\)Luther's Works, 39:102.  
\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 101.  
\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 102.  
\(^{21}\)Treatises, "German Nobility," p. 14.
boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop and pope, though it is not seemly that everyone should exercise the office.\textsuperscript{22} Secular authorities had been ordained by God to punish the wicked and protect the law-abiding; therefore they should be left to do their job without interference "without respect of persons, whether it affect pope, bishop, priests, monks, nuns, or anybody else."\textsuperscript{23} They must do this because it was their duty to protect Christendom from "Roman avarice."\textsuperscript{24} Even should a miracle occur which seemed to support the pope against the temporal powers, "it should be considered only the work of the devil, because of the weakness of our faith in God."\textsuperscript{25} Above all, the papal legates should be driven out of German lands, along "with their 'faculties', which they sell us for large sums of money."\textsuperscript{26} Subjects should be forbidden by their rulers to "pay the annates to Rome."\textsuperscript{27} Luther was clearly inviting the German nobility to make a complete break with the Roman church.

Therefore, the Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom, and should do this for the salvation of the poor souls who must go to ruin through his tyranny.\textsuperscript{28}

These, then, were Luther's plans for reforming the Roman church. It is clear that Luther would accept no less than complete capitulation by the Romanists in favor of his

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 15. \textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 17. \textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 44. \textsuperscript{25}Ibid., pp. 25-26. \textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 85. \textsuperscript{27}Ibid., p. 45. \textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 46.
Gospel. Freedom of debate and negotiation were closed off, and absolute adherence to the Gospel was necessary in order to protect innocent souls from corruption by the papists. Even miracles could not lend credibility to the papists' positions. Yet Luther did not consider that he had left the "apostolic" church, but rather that the Romans had moved away from the one, true, Christian church. Luther would establish a community of believers, chosen by the grace of God, with the Word guiding their actions. The role of the secular authorities was to protect them from interference by the Roman church.

A Prelude on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church was an attempt to destroy and discredit the sacramental system of the Roman church. Luther was attacking the fundamental dogmas of the Church, using the Word as his authority. He denounced the Romanists as being the true heretics and schismatics.\(^2^9\) It was they who had established the elaborate sacramental system for which Luther could find no Scriptural basis. He reduced the sacraments from seven to three, "baptism, penance, and the bread."\(^3^0\) Later he would eliminate penance because of its connection with work-righteousness. At this point, although Luther believed in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, he was content to let others believe as they chose

\(^{2^9}\)Treatises, "Babylonian Captivity," p. 133.

\(^{3^0}\)Ibid., p. 126.
regarding the essence in bread and wine. Baptism alone benefited no one; it was the faith in the promise that adhered to baptism that gave the sacrament its importance. Luther's change in attitude at a later date, regarding the Eucharist and baptism, would have a most detrimental effect on the Reformation.

Luther's most revolutionary tract, A Treatise on Christian Liberty, opened up a tinderbox Luther had not known to exist. Dedicated to Pope Leo in a final attempt to reconcile their differences, the accompanying letter was undiplomatic and a harsh indictment of the Roman Curia and intolerant to all those who had opposed him in the name of the pope. "The name of the Roman Curia is today a stench throughout the world, papal authority languishes, and Roman ignorance, one honored, is in ill repute." His reason for attacking the Roman see was concern for the salvation of Leo and others who might be led astray by the Curia. Luther suggested that it would be better for the pope to resign than to remain "a sheep among the wolves" and announced that "It is all over with the Holy See of Rome." Furthermore, he reiterated his lack of intent to recant, asserting with absolute finality that "I

33Ibid., p. 47.
34Woolf, 1:339.
acknowledge no fixed rules for the interpretation of the Word of God, since the Word of God, which teaches freedom in all other matters, must not be bound. . . ."35

The tract on Christian liberty was the basis of Luther's theology, and was less polemical than those referred to above. In it he advanced two propositions dealing with Christian freedom. "A Christian man is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."36 It was the first proposition that appealed to the people of Germany. They tended to ignore the second. The most revolutionary part of the tract was in his assertion that the Christian man was free from the law.

It is clear then that a Christian man has in his faith all that he needs, and needs no works to justify him. And if he has no needs of works, neither does he need the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law, and it is true, "the law is not made for a righteous man."37

Luther clearly stated in this text that he was speaking only of a spiritual liberty which "makes our hearts free from all sins, laws, and mandates."38 This was ignored, or not understood by the medieval society that was ripe for change. Luther was not concerned that the medieval system was so closely bound together, not only ecclesiastically, but

35Dillinberger, p. 50.
37Ibid., p. 258.  
38Ibid., p. 283.
politically, economically, and socially as well, that drastically changing any part of the unit could lead to revolution. Luther pursued only the truth and was convinced that the Gospel could not move forward "without tumult, offense and sedition." Still, he was counting on the secular authorities to keep it within bounds, and he anticipated trouble only from the Roman church, not those lesser elements of society which soon challenged his authority. Luther was content to let God handle all such problems, since God had chosen to act through him, against his will. In the event rebellion should occur, as some anticipated, Luther refused to accept responsibility for it, "for I tried to induce the German nobility to bridle the Romanists not with the sword, but, as they easily could, by wise decrees."

Luther's appearance at Worms was an anticlimax. He had already declared his lack of intent to recant. The papal legate noted that Luther "refuses as judges all representatives of the Church, all theologians, jurists and philosophers, in short, all whom he suspects, that is, the whole learned world outside of Germany." Luther had already

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39 _Correspondence_, Luther to Spalatin between February 12 and 18, 1520, 1:287.

40 _Ibid._

41 _Ibid._, Luther to Spalatin, February 27, 1521, 1:473.

42 _Ibid._, Aleander to Cardinal Lawrence Pucci at Rome, December 17, 1520, 1:425.
decided on his course, committed to the idea that "no one can be saved unless he fights against the laws and commands of the pope and bishops." Anyone who failed to make themselves "the enemy of the Pope and bishops and fight their decrees" would be "an enemy of Christ." Luther was examined before the emperor and, true to his word, refused to recant any part of his writings, unless he were convinced of error "by the authority of the Old or New Testament only." His dogmatic insistence on the authority of his own interpretation of the Gospel, precluded any negotiation, had any been intended.

My position is that I must be overmastered by the testimony of Holy Scripture, or overmastered by self-evident reasoning—for I believe neither in the pope nor in councils alone, because it is as clear as the day that they have often erred and contradicted themselves. I am overmastered by the Scripture adduced by me and my conscience is prisoner to God's Word. The result is that I neither can nor will revoke, because it is hard, hurtful, and dangerous to do anything contrary to conscience. God help me. Amen.

Luther vehemently denied that he had taught opposition to authority in his attacks on the papacy, on the basis of their morality, but rather because of their false doctrine.

43 Ibid., Luther to Nicholas Hausmann, March 22, 1521, 1:499.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., Aleander to Vice-Chancellor Cardinal De Medici at Rome, April 18 and 19, 1521, 1:529.
"For authority and obedience are abrogated by false doctrine." Their false doctrine was necessarily replaced by Luther's interpretation of Holy Scripture, which had enslaved his conscience. Henceforth, this would be the determining authority in all Luther's quarrels. The Edict of Worms forbade Luther to preach, write, or publish, all of which Luther totally ignored. Neither the pope nor the emperor should be obeyed, when interfering with Luther's faith and conscience.

Luther spent the following year secluded at Castle Wartburg, from whence he carried on his incendiary correspondence and pamphlets. He had become aware of his power and convinced of his course.

If the Pope shall take steps against all those who think with me, Germany will be in a tumult; and the sooner he tries it, the sooner he and his will perish and I shall return. The Lord is arousing the spirits of many, and especially the common people, and it seems to me unlikely that this matter can be put down by force.

Little did Luther realize the prophetic quality of his words, nor that they would be his problem as well as the pope's.

Unrest in Wittenberg "compelled" Luther to return in the spring of 1522, to take leadership of the reforms being initiated there. While Luther approved of the abolition of masses and monastic vows, Carlstadt and Zwilling had been moving too fast in this direction, inciting the people and

47 Correspondence, Luther to Count Albert of Mansfeld, May 3, 1521, 1:557.
48 Ibid., Luther to Melanchthon, May 26, 1521, 2:36.
causing riots. Luther voiced his disapproval to Melanchthon. "Although it is good that those lazy, ungodly priests be harassed, yet this method creates disgrace and just repulsion for our gospel."\(^4^9\) The following week he preached eight sermons, directed at abolishing the mass, but trying to show that mob violence was wrong and would not bring about a reformation; nor could faith be compelled. The Word of God must be used to accomplish these goals. Luther asserted his authority by reminding them that he was the first one through whom God had revealed his Word; therefore, he was sure that it was the true Word of God.\(^5^0\) Obsessed with the righteousness of his course and blind to the impact his dogmatic stance was having throughout the German states, Luther boasted: "Had I desired to ferment trouble, I could have brought great bloodshed upon Germany; indeed I could have started such a game that even the emperor would not have been safe."\(^5^1\) Instead, Luther declared, the Word of God had done the job for him.

Luther was not long content to let the Word do its work unaided. Faced with opposition from both the Catholics and right-wing dissenters, Luther began to modify his stand and undertook reforms himself, using coercion when necessary. He strongly urged the Elector to stop public masses supported by

\(^4^9\) Luther's Works, Luther to Philip Melanchthon, Wartburg, about May 21, 1521, 48:214.

\(^5^0\) Ibid., 51:73.

\(^5^1\) Ibid.
the state treasury. The Eucharist was to be given in both kinds. "We have been sufficiently indulgent...and those who are offended by a practice that has become so well known are not weak, but rather obstinate." When the canons of Wittenberg continued to say masses and the Elector did not interfere, Luther informed them:

...it is my kindly request and earnest desire that you put an end to all this factional and sectarian business, like masses and vigils, and abolish everything that is contrary to the Holy Gospel...But if you refuse to do this...I shall not rest until you are compelled to do it against your will.

True to his word, Luther saw that masses were discontinued in the Castle Church on Christmas of 1524. Luther had moved a long way from freedom of conscience, and reliance on the Word of God to bring about acceptance of his Gospel. With regard to the abolishment of Catholic ceremonies, Luther advised that the "princes ought to put down public crimes like perjury and open blasphemy of God's name, such as they indulged in." Luther was unable to conceive of two religions existing in one state without dissension, and

\[52\text{Correspondence, Luther to Spalatin, January 2, 1523, 2:154.}\]

\[53\text{Ibid., Luther to Spalatin, January 14, 1523, 2:160.}\]

\[54\text{Ibid., Luther to the Canons of Wittenberg, November 17, 1524, 2:261.}\]

\[55\text{Ibid., Luther to Spalatin at Altenburg, November 11, 1525, 2:352.}\]
advised his prince to permit only one teaching to prevail in the Saxon lands. With the advent of the new Evangelical Elector, freedom of religion was quite naturally going to be denied to all who did not adhere to his faith.

Luther openly opposed the efforts of Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg to reconcile the churches of the empire. To Spalatin, who was attending the Diet, Luther wrote: "I hear that you people, like it or not, have begun a strange project, that is, to bring about unity between the pope and Luther. But the pope will not want it, and Luther sees no possibility of it." Luther dogmatically refused even to consider the issue and told Elector John that "the conditions or means of compromise proposed by the other party is by no means to be accepted." His letter to the Catholic clergy that had assembled at Augsburg was insulting and degrading, and his authoritarianism becomes most apparent in his obsession to see them humbled before his truth.

If God grants that at this diet you yield anything, we shall not accept it with the thought that your yielding is now made right which up to now has been wrong. No, you are much too trifling for us to think it lies in your discretion and power to say when and for how long God is truthful or a liar, and for how long his Word is right or wrong. . . . Rather we want you to be forced to it by God's Word and have you worn down like blasphemers, persecutors, and murderers, so that you humble yourselves before God, confess your sins, as men who have up to

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57 Luther's Works, 49:413.  
58 Ibid., p. 407.
now done wrong, persecuted God's Word, and shed innocent blood.  

In 1536 when Charles V and Pope Paul were again trying to form a Christian council to attempt to heal the break, the pope sent a papal legate to Wittenberg to smooth the way. Luther insolently and seriously informed him that

Our group does not need a council, for we already have the firm evangelical teaching and order of service, but Christendom needs it, that that part which is still held captive may discover error and truth.

As in the beginning, Luther would accept no less than complete capitulation to his cause. He had the truth; he was willing to share it with those others, so long as they admitted their previous errors, and humbled themselves properly. There could never be unity except on Luther's terms.

As he grew older, Luther continued to exercise his prerogative to chastise the papacy. Thinking himself on his deathbed, he gave the following benediction: "The Lord fill you with his benediction and with hatred of the pope." Never at a loss for descriptive and ordurous language, as Luther moved toward the end of his life, his indictments against the papacy became more scurrilous. His last work against them was filled with obscenities and could only have been written by one completely embittered by his

59 Ibid., 34:40.
60 E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 740.
61 Luther's Works, 54:228.
intolerance. The Romans were accused of every possible perversion. Both "the pope and his papacy is the spirit of the devil . . . born out of the rear end of the devil." The pope was the "bishop of hermaphrodites and the pope of sodomists." Luther was quite sure that "the pope would rather see all Germany drowned in its own blood than have the people there, and would rather have all the world go to hellfire with him than that one soul should be brought to the true faith." Since the pope was no longer Christian, having been excommunicated by Christ's order, "all the emperors, kings, and bishops are duty-bound to take back their sworn oaths and duties . . . and act against them with all their might." Luther claimed his intent in writing such a book was for posterity, to instruct those who came after him.

I only deride, with my weak derision, so that those who now live and those who come after us should know what I have thought of the pope, the damned Antichrist, and so that whoever wishes to be a Christian may be warned against such an abomination.

Thus Luther, to the very end, was fighting God's battle with Satan, attempting to save men's souls from the Antichrist, with his absolute truth. The invective tone he employed was his last desperate effort to undermine the papacy's claim to be representative of the one, true, Christian church. In attempting to restore the real, the only, true, Holy Christian

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church, Luther had succeeded in dividing society into two opposing camps. In an attempt to allow freedom of conscience in matters of the spirit, Luther had called upon the temporal authorities of his time to insure that only the "correct" interpretation of the Word of God would be accepted as the sole authority in determining the content of that conscience. The substitution of his infallible Word of God as authority for guiding the religious conscience of men, in place of the infallible pope and canon law, led to differing interpretations of the Word, and this Luther could not countenance. To enforce his Gospel of truth, Luther subjected freedom of conscience to princely authority. Under the auspices of the territorial princes, the Lutheran churches became as rigid and authoritarian as ever the Roman church had been.
CHAPTER III

LUTHER AND THE SCHAERMER

Every revolution attracts its radical elements. Almost from the beginning Luther found himself embattled on two fronts; he was besieged by the papists on one side, and on the other by various dissenting groups to whom he gave the name "Schwaermer", by which he meant fanatics. Luther's polemics had appealed to elements which had been unable to find a place in the old church system. Luther was naively unaware of the deep-rooted unrest of the time. Indeed, only someone who had led a cloistered life could believe that such an attack on the most revered institution in the lives of the people would not result in their believing it affected the social order as it applied to them.

Not all were willing to confer on Luther the mantle he had lifted from the pope, that of sole interpreter of Scripture. Some would interpret it in their own individual way and were unwilling to yield to Luther's instruction. Luther had based his teachings on his own inner faith and had chosen passages of the Bible to substantiate his beliefs, but he was unwilling to allow others the same privilege. Luther's complete confidence in his power of interpretation did not permit alternate views.
In later years, Luther would include all the left-wing dissenters under the label "Schwaermer," refusing to acknowledge differences between them. Anabaptists, Spiritualists, Sacramentarians, indeed all who disagreed with Luther's tenets, other than the papists and Jews, were so labeled. Luther's encounter with the earliest group of Schwaermer, which appeared before the Peasants' revolt, evoked his suspicions of all future groups.

There were deep theological divisions between Luther and this group, and Luther was quick to discern that Satan was guiding their activities. The Schwaermer differed from Luther on the most fundamental issues of all, justification by faith, and the authority of the Scriptures in all matters pertaining to faith. They believed that God revealed himself directly to the elect through the Spirit, often through the medium of dreams and visions.\(^1\) Rejection of infant baptism was an important part of their teaching, along with denial of original sin. Thus, even before Luther returned to Wittenberg, he found his authority challenged, and he had to redefine his position in order to combat them. Luther began to emphasize the authority of faith less, because its subjective nature lent itself to individual interpretations, and stressed the authority of the Word, the interpretation of which he alone controlled.

\(^{1}\)Oyer, p. 19.
The radical element first became evident when three men, Storch, Drechsel, and Stubner, having been driven out of Zwickau, appeared in Wittenberg while Luther was still secluded at Wartburg Castle. Luther referred to them derisively as the "heavenly prophets" because of their claims to direct revelation from God. Melanchthon was attracted to them at first, but began to have doubts, and in reporting their presence to Elector Frederic, he stated, "there are in them certain spirits, concerning which, no one save Luther can easily judge." ²

Luther became immediately aware of the subjective nature of the prophets' religion. Their claims of direct revelation were extremely distasteful to him, for revelation was based on individual experience. Revelation could not be proven unless it was attested by miracles, nor could it be easily disproven. Luther decided that the truth of their spiritual revelations was to be judged by the amount of pain and suffering accompanying them, as had occurred in the Old Testament accounts. Otherwise they were not to be trusted, because "The sign of the Son of man is then missing which is the only touchstone of Christians and a certain differentiator between the spirits." ³ He questioned their authority to preach or teach if they relied on revelation.

²Correspondence, Melanchthon to Elector Frederic at Lochau, December 27, 1521, 2:81.

³Luther's Works, Luther to Philip Melanchthon, January 13, 1522, 48:366.
alone, if they had not received a call from men. "In the old days the prophets had their authority from the Law and the prophetic order, as we now receive authority through men. I definitely do not want the "prophets" to be accepted if they state they were called by mere revelation. . . ."4

"God never sent anyone who was not either called by men or attested by miracles, not even his own Son."5 The prophets had usurped the right to preach; they had not been properly called. They relied on their own religious experience, which was unprovable and unacceptable, as their authority, and they subjected even the Scriptures to this authority. Such subjectivism with regard to Scriptural authority was bound to lead to subjectivism and individualism regarding the secular state. Wherever they appeared, disruption of the social order had occurred, as a result of their anarchistic teaching.6

The prophets rejected all outward ceremonies as a means of achieving grace, but they had singled out infant baptism in particular, because entrance into both the Roman and Lutheran church required this sacrament. Luther himself had said that faith was required for baptism to be effective. The prophets questioned existence of faith in the infant; the infant was not capable of belief.7 Luther rejected

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4Ibid.
5Correspondence, Luther to Melanchthon, January 13, 1522, 2:84.
7Ibid., p. 28.
this idea, altering his earlier position that faith was the element that made the sacrament effective. Rather than make baptism contingent on the faith of the recipient, Luther now claimed that the sacrament was commanded by God; therefore it was valid when accompanied by the Word. In this way grace was conferred on men by God. Luther further bolstered his argument by claiming that the traditional church had always practiced infant baptism. Could the whole church through the ages have been wrong? Luther denied the prophets' ability to prove their case, having neither testimonies or illustrations, while the Lutherans were supported by both in the form of traditional practice. The Lutheran position, therefore, could not be contradicted.

For who will argue,—"We must believe and be baptized, therefore infants must not be baptized"? They cannot draw that conclusion from that text, for it does not prove that infants do not believe; but I presuppose that, and cannot. For what is not against the Scriptures is for the Scriptures and the Scriptures are for it...

This same argument had been used by Luther in support of the use of the sword by the secular authorities.

Luther was able to discern the nature of the prophets through reports from Wittenberg, without having met them. When they did meet later, his suspicions were confirmed. Luther rejected them with the comment that "Hitherto I have

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8Correspondence, Luther to Melanchthon, January 13, 1522, 2:85-86.

9Luther's Works, Luther to Philip Melanchthon, July 13, 1521, 48:259.
heard nothing said or done by them which Satan could not emulate." To Luther, Satan was an active power on earth. All history consisted of the continuous struggle between Satan and God for the hearts of man. Satan had first attacked God's people through the papacy, and now through the Schwaermer. Satan could only be exorcised through the proper teaching of the Word. Luther complained that "Satan, who is always mingling with the children of God, has started a fine game for us, and especially for me, here at Wittenberg." After his interviews with the prophets he reported to Nicholas Hausmann:

Your Zwickau prophets were about to bring forth monsters, which, if born, would have done no little damage. . . Satan has attempted much evil here in my fold, and in such a manner that it is hard to oppose him without scandal. Be on your guard against all innovations made by public decree or popular agitation. What our friends attempt by force and violence must be resisted by word only.

The clarion call to individual freedom that Luther had issued had appealed to these men. They took it at its full value and exercised their freedom of conscience to develop their own interpretation of theology. Luther sensed the threat to his evangelical cause in permitting anarchistic

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10 Correspondence, Luther to Melanchthon, January 13, 1522, 2:84.

11 Ibid., Luther to Harmuth von Cronberg, Mid March, 1522, 2:106.

12 Ibid., Luther to Nicholas Hausmann at Zwickau, March 17, 1522, 2:110.
views to exist within society, causing confusion among simple hearts, and provoking violence by their teachings. The prophets believed they could detect the elect through intuition. They denied the basic beliefs upon which Luther had based his revolt from the church. They were no more in favor of individual freedom than was Luther, and they did not limit their attacks to spiritual matters alone. They also criticized the civil authorities. Luther felt it necessary to refute them from Scripture and posited the Word of God against their unknown Spirit. The prophets left Wittenberg, scattering throughout Germany, contributing to the development of various sects and peasant unrest.

The revolutionary teachings of Thomas Munzer formed the second element in Luther's concept of the Schwaermer. A former protege of Luther, Munzer believed himself to be a chosen instrument of God, empowered to bring about the "kingdom of God on earth" and he believed the time was imminent. The church that Munzer proposed was composed of a group of people, any group of people, chosen by the Spirit. God sent the Spirit freely to everyone to aid them in achieving faith. This church was more rigid and tyrannical than Luther's invisible church, permitting less personal freedom, and no theological freedom. Anyone could become a member through the medium of the Spirit, and all who were not members were
considered to be not of the elect; therefore they were subject to extirpation.\textsuperscript{13}

Ironically, perhaps, Luther had a great influence on Munzer and his interpretation of the Gospel. He was instrumental in placing Munzer as a pastor at St. Mary's Church in Zwickau. Brilliant, a well educated biblical scholar, Munzer quickly became the most eloquent spokesman for the disinherited of the land. He preached his new religion with emphasis on violent social reform, urging his followers to overthrow the oppressive social order, both political and religious, Catholic and Lutheran. Munzer's study of the Scriptures convinced him that the rulers must be godly; if not godly, then they were to be overthrown by the elect.\textsuperscript{14} Such concepts inevitably led Munzer into conflict with Luther and the civil authorities. Luther objected both to his extreme spiritualism and to his strong polemics in presenting his message.

It is doubtful that Luther and Munzer met again after Luther heard of his activities at Zwickau, although Luther had asked the authorities at Allstedt "to urge the man to confer with us about his teaching."\textsuperscript{15} The subjectivism of Munzer's religion was most displeasing to Luther. Munzer placed the Spirit above Scripture as the absolute authority.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Oyer}, p. 20. \textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 21. \textsuperscript{15}\textit{Correspondence}, Luther to Spalatin, August 3, 1523, 2:193.
Since the Spirit was an individual experience, it could not be examined and explained. Luther's authority, the Word of God, as he interpreted it, was less subjective than Munzer's Spirit, and the Word was open to examination. The Word carried with it the evidence of historical revelation as revealed through the Scriptures. Luther did not deny that the Spirit existed, that God used it to give force to the Word, but to Luther the Spirit was firmly tied to Scripture. To Munzer all men carried within them the seed of faith, which God activated through the Spirit, even without Scripture. Coupled with this, Munzer also believed that the state of the lower classes needed a radical improvement, and that Christianity, if it were to be interpreted correctly, should bring about equality to all men. He rejected Luther's justification by faith, because it was dependent upon theologians to interpret it by their understanding of the Scripture. The theologians were allied with the authorities to keep the masses in their place.  

Luther sensed the danger in Munzer's revolutionary utterances, which were embroiling the masses in general unrest, inciting them to revolt against all authority. Moreover, he was attempting to lead the simple people away from the Word of God, toward a more individualistic interpretation of religion, without foundation in Scripture. Subjective individual interpretations, without the controlling influence of

16Oyer, p. 31.  
17Ibid., p. 19.
Luther's Word, could easily lead to demands for individual freedom from all authority. Munzer was urging these simple souls to unite in a Bund, with the express intention of overthrowing all constituted authority, both spiritual and secular. Luther advised the collector of Allstedt to have nothing to do with Munzer. "Certainly I cannot endure that 'Spirit,' whoever he is. He praised my work, as Thomas himself writes me, and yet he despises it and seeks other and greater things."

Luther knew who that "Spirit" was. It was Satan masked in the corporeal form of Munzer. As Munzer's activities increased and he moved into Saxon lands, Luther warned his rulers that Satan "has at last settled in your Grace's electorate, and made himself a nest at Allstedt,..." He warned the rulers that the mob was inclined toward sedition, and urged them to "deal seriously with such disturbances and extravagances,..." The rulers were to let them preach as they liked, because the Word of God would always be under attack. However, should they desire to dispense with the Word and resort to force, the princes should intervene with the sword, "for God will demand an answer and

18Correspondence, Luther to Spalatin, August 3, 1523, 2:193.


20Luther's Works, 40:57.
reckoning from you for a careless or spiritless use of the sword." Thus, unable to contain this incorrigible spirit, Luther called on the secular authorities to keep order. They were not to interfere with the Word; that was out of their jurisdiction. But they must prevent riots and insurrection.

Munzer attempted to enlist the Saxon princes, Duke John, and his son, John Frederick, in his communion of the elect. He offered them the choice of joining the "godly" in their efforts to promote the eschatological kingdom or of suffering the consequences of a righteous rebellion. Under pressure, Munzer left Allstedt for Mulhausen, wandered through Germany, stirring up the peasants, and figured prominently in the Peasants' Revolt, where he was captured and executed.

The spectre of Munzer remained always with Luther. For the rest of his life he held the fear of seditious rebellion, set in motion by forces he believed to be guided by Satan. This had a great deal to do with his suspicions when dealing with later groups of dissenters. When faced with the rebellion of the peasants, Luther would comment:

Well, anyone who has seen Munzer can say that he has seen the very devil, and at his worst. Oh God! If this is the spirit that is in the peasants, it is high time that they were all killed like mad dogs.

21 Correspondence, Luther to the Elector Frederic and Duke John of Saxony, July, 1524, 2:243.

22 Oyer, p. 17.

23 Ibid., p. 18.

24 Correspondence, Luther to John Ruhel, May 30, 1524, 2:321.
Luther had opposed the authority of the Schwaermer's Spirit with the Word of God. The Spirit was a nebulous quality, it could take any form it chose, based on dreams and revelation. Revelation could not be explained. The Word could be interpreted. The Word was more stable because it was grounded in Scripture, whereas the Spirit knew no bounds.

Luther had accepted a divinely ordained secular authority, to whom all must be obedient, except in matters of faith. Opposed to this, the Schwaermer believed that all the ills of society were caused by the "ungodly" rulers, spiritual and secular. Their stated intent was to overthrow and exterminate them if they refused to accept their convictions.

Both Luther and the Schwaermer believed in the elect, although they differed over the method by which grace was achieved. Munzer's elect were not predestined; he advocated freedom of the will. Munzer's elect were a visible group, charged with the extirpation of the non-elect: all those who refused to join their Bund. Thus freedom of choice and of conscience under Munzer's leadership was an illusion. No freedom existed.
CHAPTER IV

LUTHER AND THE PEASANTS

It was during the Peasants' Revolution that Luther's authoritarianism, his dedication to law and order, became most apparent. Luther feared that the rebellion would have dire implications for both the kingdom of God and God's earthly kingdom. Satan had again invaded Germany, and Luther rightly feared that the holocaust would have disastrous results in both kingdoms. "If this rebellion were to continue and get the upper hand, both kingdoms would be destroyed and there would be neither worldly government nor word of God, which would ultimately result in the permanent destruction of all Germany."¹

When the peasants took Luther's concept of freedom of the Christian man and tried to take it to its logical conclusion, freedom from economic bondage to the church and legal bondage from their overlords, Luther was shocked at their outburst. It had not occurred to him that the people would misconstrue his doctrine and use it as an excuse to rebel against constituted authority. Indeed, his theology forbade such action. Luther had always preached against

¹Luther's Works, 46:18.
insurrection, "no insurrection is ever right, no matter how
two right the cause it seeks to promote." Nevertheless, the
Twelve Articles outlining the peasants' demands indicate
that Luther's teachings had some effect on their ideas, es-
pecially the first article, which asked that the community
be allowed to call its own pastor, and the twelfth article,
which stated their willingness to delete any article that
contradicted Scripture.

That the peasants had gained inspiration from men like
Munzer, undoubtedly is true. It is no less true that Luther's
teachings contributed to their discontent and desire for
Christian freedom. After all, Luther had rebelled against
both pope and emperor and had disobeyed his own prince.
With such an example before them, they found it difficult to
believe their freedom existed only in the spiritual realm,
and not the political as well. Besides, his democratic-sound-
ing message of the brotherhood of all men and virtue of all
Christian vocations leveled the barriers and taught equality
among men, connotations that Luther had never intended.

Long before Luther's reforms began, the burdens of the
decaying feudal society had created widespread unrest among
the peasants. This resentment was often directed against
the Catholic church, whose bishops were often the major land-
lords. Insurrections had been common events. But the Peasants'
Rebellion in Germany in 1525 differed in that it misused the

\[2\text{Ibid.}, \ 45:63.\]  \[3\text{Edwards, p. 60.}\]
doctrines of Luther to sanction armed combat to achieve social and political ends.  

The rebellion began unexpectedly in Thuringia, incited by the violent exhortations of Thomas Munzer. From Thuringia it spread rapidly, and by the spring of 1525 most of Germany had been inflamed. In different places the peasants put their demands in manifestoes, the most famous of which has been called The Twelve Articles. It identified their cause as Christian and subject to correction by Scripture. Their demands were moderate; they were seeking to eliminate oppressions imposed on them by their lords, such as death taxes, tithing, rents, game laws, and woodcutting.

At the beginning, in an attempt to keep peace, Luther replied to the articles cautiously. He explained that he was answering because the peasants claimed they were willing to submit to correction by Scripture, and this Luther intended to do. "I do this in a friendly and Christian spirit, as a duty of brotherly love, so that if any misfortune or disaster comes out of this matter, it may not be attributed to me, nor will I be blamed before God and men because of my silence." First of all Luther reproved the princes, laying the guilt for the rebellion on them, because as civil authorities they did "nothing but cheat and rob the people so

4Luther's Works, 46:5.  
5Ibid.  
6Edwards, p. 60.  
7Luther's Works, 46:17.
that you may lead a life of luxury and extravagance."\(^8\) Worse yet, they were blaming the uprising on Luther's Gospel, claiming it to be the result of his teaching. "This rebellion cannot be coming from me. Rather the murder-prophets, who hate me as they hate you, have come among the people and have gone about among them for more than three years and no one has resisted and fought against them except me."\(^9\) The princes were advised to try kindness in dealing with the peasants, rather than fight them, because they could not foresee the results of such a fight.\(^10\)

Luther had no intention of letting the peasants tie their rebellion to the Reformation. Luther was not unsympathetic to their desire for social justice. His opposition to their actions was directed by his belief that, by identifying their cause with his own, they were using his call for religious freedom through the Gospel in order to obtain their own political and economic goals, as well as personal freedom. To Luther, religious "rightness" had nothing whatsoever to do with personal freedom, no matter how "right" the cause. He condemned their cause as unreligious. "Not one of the articles teaches anything of the gospel. Rather everything is aimed at obtaining freedom for your person and for your property."\(^11\) Luther warned the peasants that by

\(^{8}\text{Ibid, p. 18.}\) \(^{9}\text{Ibid, p. 20}\) \(^{10}\text{Ibid., p. 21.}\) \(^{11}\text{Ibid., p. 35.}\)
rebelling against their rulers, they were acting contrary, not only to Christian law, but also to natural law. "The fact that rulers are wicked and unjust does not excuse disorder and rebellion, for the punishing of wickedness is not the responsibility of everyone, but of the worldly rulers who bear the sword."\textsuperscript{12} While the rulers might be guilty of robbing them of their property, their usurpation of the rulers' authority was far worse, therefore the peasants were the greater robbers.\textsuperscript{13} Besides, Christians were meant to suffer. "And if it does happen that a Christian must, for the sake of the gospel, constantly move from one place to another, and leave all his possessions behind him . . . he is only experiencing what is appropriate for a Christian."\textsuperscript{14}

Christianity, then, to Luther, in no way represented personal freedom. A Christian had no resources open to him to relieve oppression. To attempt to do so, according to Luther, was to make freedom a purely physical or carnal matter.\textsuperscript{15} The leveling process, indicated by the priesthood of all believers, wherein all estates became equal, meant only that a spiritual equality existed. The peasants' assertion that serfs no longer existed, because Christ had freed them, was a direct contradiction of the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 25.  \textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 26.  \textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 37.  \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 39.
article would make all men equal and turn the Spiritual kingdom of Christ into a worldly, eternal kingdom; and that is impossible. A worldly kingdom cannot exist without an inequality of persons, some being free, some imprisoned, some lords, some subjects, etc.\textsuperscript{16}

Unless the peasants desisted in claiming their cause to be Christian, they could consider Luther their enemy. They were enemies of the gospel, who only wished to suppress it.\textsuperscript{17}

Luther clearly saw the reason behind this. "For I see well that the devil, who has not been able to destroy me through the pope, now seeks to exterminate me and swallow me up by means of the bloodthirsty prophets of murder and spirits of rebellion that are among you."\textsuperscript{18} Luther warned the peasants that they must be careful and not force him to use his prayers against them; he was sure that God would hear and take action from his prayer.\textsuperscript{19} The peasants could have no such confidence "because your conscience and the Scriptures testify that your enterprise is heathenish, and not Christian, and, under the name of the gospel, works against the gospel and brings contempt upon the name Christian."\textsuperscript{20} Most importantly, by associating their actions with his gospel, they were hindering his mission. "For no matter how right you are, it is not right for a Christian to appeal to law, or to fight, but rather to suffer wrong and endure all."\textsuperscript{21}

The peasants felt they had suffered sufficiently and did not heed his council. Luther raged against them

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 32
  \item \textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 33.
  \item \textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 33.
  \item \textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 31.
\end{itemize}
furiously in *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*. His anger and stringent demands for punishment were extreme. The peasants were in rebellion;

Therefore let everyone who can, smite, slay and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog; if you do not strike him, he will strike you, and a whole land with you.\(^2\)

No devils could be left in hell because they had all incorporated themselves into the peasants, and if the prince refused to use his sword to punish them, he was, thereby, guilty of all their crimes. The "true martyrs" were fighting with the princes, while anyone who fought with the peasants was an "eternal firebrand of hell."\(^3\) He urged the rulers to use all their might against the peasants, for

If there were thousands more peasants than there are they would all be robbers and murderers, who take the sword with criminal intent to drive out lords, princes and all else, and make a new order in the world for which they have from God neither command, right, power, nor injunction, as the lords now have to suppress them. They are faithless and perjured, and still worse they bring the Divine Word and Gospel to shame and dishonor, a most horrible sin.\(^4\)

Luther was sure that coercion would be effective, and commented to John Ruhel: "It is pitiful that we have to be so cruel to the poor people, but what can we do? It is necessary and God wills it, ... Do not be so worried about

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 50.  
\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 51-53.  
\(^4\)Correspondence, Luther to John Ruhel at Mansfeld, May 4, 1525, 2:308-309.
it, for it will profit many souls, whom it will terrify and restrain."25

The peasants and other observers were surprised that Luther would turn on them so harshly. They should not have been. It was perfectly consistent with his earlier thinking. "I am and always will be on the side of those against whom insurrection is directed, no matter how unjust their cause, because there can be no insurrection without hurting the innocent and spilling their blood."26 Luther could rightly claim that he had always taught that political authorities were to be obeyed and that sedition was wicked. He still did not waver in that position.

My opinion is that it is better that all peasants be killed than that the magistrates and princes perish, because the peasants took the sword without divine authority . . . and even if the princes of this world go too far, nevertheless they bear the sword by God's authority. Under them it is possible for both kingdoms to exist. Therefore no pity, no patience is due the peasants, . . . To justify them, to pity them, to favor them, is to deny and blaspheme God and to try to pull him down from heaven.27

Luther's enemies were quick to exploit his untenable position and his harsh treatment of the peasants. He was compared to Pilate, and he replied in kind. Those who supported the peasants' cause were "rebels at heart, for they
show no mercy on those whom the peasants overthrew, robbed, dishonored, and subjected to all kinds of injustice." Had Luther's advice been followed at the beginning of the rebellion and had "a hundred of them been knocked down so that the rest would have tripped over them . . . ;" thousands of lives would have been saved. Since they were mad and would not listen to the Word, they deserved to be killed. "We ought to pray for them that they may be obedient; if not then let the shot whistle, or they will make things a thousandfold worse." Rebels deserved neither mercy nor a trial.

After the rebellion had been quelled Luther would recommend clemency to be shown toward the peasants. Still, "Munzer and the peasants have done much damage to the gospel here, have revived the spirits of the papists so much, that it seems we have to begin building all over again." So many people had been killed and orphaned, so much destruction had occurred, that he found "the appearance of Germany was never more miserable than now." The social, political, and economic status of the peasants had been worsened, and the peasants, believing that Luther had betrayed them, turned away from his evangelical reform, moving either back

28Luther's Works. 46:71. 29Ibid., p. 75.
30Correspondence, Luther to John Ruhel, May 30, 1525, 2:321.
31Luther's Works, 46:81. 32Ibid., 49:123.
33Ibid., p. 124.
to Roman Catholicism or to one of the various sects that the Reformation had helped to bring into existence.

Luther, by clinging to the medieval concept of the structure of society, had given up the opportunity to become the leader of revolution and change the old feudal system, allowing the peasants to have personal freedom. Had he not attacked them so stridently, had he attempted to mediate between the peasants and the authorities, it is possible that some of the burdens of the peasantry could have been alleviated. Luther, instead, chose to subject freedom to law and order. Thereafter, Lutheranism held little appeal to the lower orders of society.

The effect of the rebellion was to have more lasting results on Germany than the brutal slaughter of the peasants and destruction of property. Having heeded Luther's call to protect the Gospel and restore order, the rulers continued to exercise control in matters of religion. Luther had previously denied them this office. They used the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* as a basis to set up state religions; the faith of the ruler was to determine the faith of the community. Luther advocated this measure as a means to keep order; believing that conflicting religions could not co-exist in the same territory. Thus, Luther again sacrificed freedom of individual conscience to law and order. The prince assumed the authority for enforcing adherence to the state religion. Evangelical reform had deteriorated
from freedom of conscience in matters of faith, to acceptance of the faith of princely absolutism. To obey both his conscience and his ruler was often impossible; thus, the only alternative for a citizen was to emigrate. This, too, often proved to be an unsatisfactory solution, because the next hereditary ruler might be of a different faith.
CHAPTER V

LUTHER AND THE ANABAPTISTS

No more tragic story occurred during the German Reformation than that of the persecution of the peaceful, but anarchistic Anabaptists. They were the most individualistic, and the most cruelly persecuted of all the sects that arose from the ashes of Luther's revolt. Although belief varied from group to group, and almost all of them adhered to belief in adult rather than infant baptism, theirs was never a unified sect. Generally most of the groups that Luther and others classified as Anabaptists were pacifists, believed in complete separation of church and state, refusing to take oaths of allegiance or to defend the state by force. From Luther's preaching on the freedom of individual conscience, they carried the idea of Christian liberty to its logical conclusion, and Luther came to hate them for it. Most of them had no quarrel with the state or organized religion; they only asked to peacefully worship God in their own way. Since they asked for no more than Luther had claimed for himself, the right of freedom of conscience to hold their own religious convictions, their persecution can only be viewed as a most regrettable travesty of justice.
Even the name "Anabaptist." given to them by their enemies, was a misnomer. The word meant "rebaptizer." They insisted on adult baptism since they were unable to find sanctioning for infant baptism in the New Testament. Thus, they considered infant baptism to be invalid. Unable to refute them from Scripture, Luther and his contemporaries accused them of rebaptism and Imperial law made that a capital offense.\(^1\)

Luther always attempted to link these diverse sects with the Peasants' Revolt, but no Anabaptists participated, "for the first recorded evangelical rebaptism dates from January 1525."\(^2\) Anabaptists had first appeared in Switzerland and quickly gained converts among lower class laborers and artisans of the towns. They immediately clashed with Zwingli over infant baptism, and by the end of 1525 their leaders had been imprisoned or exiled. They lived in Germany for a time, making converts, without attracting the attention of either Catholics or Lutherans.\(^3\) Luther appears to have been unaware of their presence until it was brought to his attention by concerned Catholic correspondents in 1528.

So far we have escaped such rabble preachers in the territory of our prince. . . . I have not, for my part, given much thought to these baptizers. . . .

\(^1\)Oyer, p. 5.


\(^3\)Durant, p. 397.
You will not suffer the gospel, so you will have to endure these devil's rebels.  

Luther appeared to deplore the treatment Anabaptists were receiving at the hands of the papists.

I truly grieve, that these miserable folk should be so lamentably murdered, burned, and tormented to death. We should allow everyone to believe what he wills. If his faith be false, he will be sufficiently punished in eternal hell-fire. Why then should we martyr these people . . . if their error be in faith alone and they are not guilty of rebellion or opposition to the government.

The Anabaptists' position in regard to baptism was tolerable to Luther at this point, because they did not destroy the sacrament as did the Sacramentarians, but gave it a new and different character.  

Error in faith was less lamentable than opposition toward the government authorities.

Although Luther appeared tolerant towards this group when he first became aware of them, he had previously decided on his policy toward dissenters and had it in effect. When Hans Denck and three painters were expelled from Nuremberg for their "godless" preaching, Luther advised that they not be punished by the secular authorities because he believed them to be not blasphemers, but rather like Turks or apostates. However, if they should refuse to obey the authorities, they had "forfeited their rights to property and person. For there is certainly rebellion and murder in their hearts. In that case, secular government must act

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4Luther's Works, 40:230.
5Ibid.
6Ibid., p. 262.
against them."\(^7\) The authorities should only suppress such external abominations as "public cursing and blasphemy" and perjury.\(^8\)

Luther urged uniformity of preaching in Saxon lands, alleging that a prince should not let his people be divided by opposing religions. Only one religion should be tolerated by the state. Unable to believe that Christians could exist peacefully within the same territory unless they were united by creed, Luther encouraged the Elector to draw up Visitation Ordinances that insured uniformity in all Saxon churches. Anyone suspected of doctrinal error was to be examined; if he persisted in his error, he would be banished. Luther was a medieval man, attempting to hold on to the medieval dream of Corpus Christianus. No one was forced to attend church, but it was only natural that he became suspect if he failed to do so.\(^10\)

With the appearance of Anabaptists in Saxon lands, Luther was less inclined to be tolerant of them. Early in his evangelical ministry, Luther was willing to permit anyone to believe as he wanted in regard to baptism, stressing the efficacy of faith, rather than the sacrament, in

\(^7\)Ibid., Luther to Lazarus Spengler, Wittenberg, February 4, 1525, 49:99.

\(^8\)Correspondence, Luther to George Spalatin at Altenburg, November 11, 1525, 2:352.

\(^9\)Ibid., Luther to Spalatin, September 13, 1527, 2:414.

\(^10\)Erasmus and Luther, p. 260.
achieving salvation, for "it is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but is the faith in the word of promise, to which baptism is added."\textsuperscript{11} With the Anabaptists on hand, he now declared "whoever permits himself be rebaptized rejects his former faith and righteousness, and is guilty of sin and condemnation. Of all things such behavior is most horrible."\textsuperscript{12}

Unable to refute the Anabaptists from Scripture, Luther was willing to rely on tradition in order to support his tenets toward infant baptism. "Were child baptism now wrong God would certainly not have permitted it to continue so long, nor let it become so universally and thoroughly established in all Christendom."\textsuperscript{13} The Church had baptized infants for over a thousand years.

Moreover, because the church never existed except among the baptized, and it was necessary that the church always exist, therefore infant baptism is true baptism. So I argue a priori that Christ commanded that all nations be taught and baptized, and this included children.\textsuperscript{14}

It quickly becomes apparent that it was the subversiveness in the Anabaptists that Luther feared, rather than their theology. In them he saw "the natural fruit of the devil" because their rebaptism had led them to desert homes and families and to rebel against all authority.\textsuperscript{15} Authorities

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Treatises}, "Babylonian Captivity," p. 178.
\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Luther's Works}, 40:250.
\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 249.
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, 51:113.
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}, 40:250.
in both church and state found it simpler and more expedient to suppress their radical dissent, rather than seek to understand their beliefs. Luther trusted them less than he did Rome; in fact, "We on our part confess that there is much that is Christian and good under the papacy; indeed everything that is Christian and good is to be found there and has come to us from this source."  

Even though the Emperor had decreed that Anabaptists and other false teachers should suffer capital punishment, Luther was hesitant, because, throughout time, when the law had decreed that they be put to death, wicked rulers had often used this law as pretext to eliminate innocent prophets when it was to their advantage. Luther was hesitant because he feared the same might be true in their case. Banishment was sufficient. He did insist that the Elector ban all Anabaptist writing. Permitting only one religion to exist in the state harmed no one, according to Luther, because this did not force them to "profess the faith." However, should any persons hold different beliefs and refuse to be converted, they must "hold their tongues and believe what they please . . . Even unbelievers should be forced to obey the Ten Commandments,

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16 Ibid., p. 231.
17 Correspondence, Luther to Wenzel Link at Nuremberg, July 14, 1528, 2:447.
18 Mueller, p. 62.
attend church, and outwardly conform."\(^{19}\) Should anyone refuse to believe or conform, he should be made to keep silent so that no seed of civil discord be nourished. For he who wants to speak against the Christian faith should do this in public, and he should be checked through the authority of the government either publicly or privately."\(^{20}\) Opposition against acceptance of the regional religion became opposition against the state; therefore "these people should be compelled to attend those sermons in which they can learn secular obedience . . . regardless of whether they believe the gospel or not. . . ."\(^{21}\) Both personal freedom and freedom of conscience had been subordinated to the needs of the state.

Lutheran and Catholic princes met together at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 and resolved to implement the Emperor's edict that called for the death penalty for Anabaptists. As Luther had persistently asked, there was to be a uniform religion in each state. The Augsburg Confession the following year stated that no man should teach publically in the Church, or administer the sacraments, unless he had been right-ly called.\(^{22}\) All this Luther accepted; he had long advocated action against false teachers. He placed emphasis on their civil character rather than their theological positions. They

\(^{19}\) Smith, Life and Letters, p. 218.

\(^{20}\) Luther's Works, Luther to Thomas Loscher, August 26, 1529, 49:233.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 234.

\(^{22}\) Mueller, p. 62.
were seditious and taught that rulers were not to be tolerated, that Christians should not hold public office, that all property should be held in common. "These teachers are immediately, and without doubt, to be punished by the rulers. . . . They are not heretics only but rebels."  

Rulers should punish those who taught anything other than the accepted "articles of faith" for blasphemy, which Luther well knew carried the death penalty.  

This would in no way force belief, it would merely prohibit the teaching of blasphemy, for the Law of Moses commanded that blasphemers and false teachers be stoned. "So in this case there ought not to be much disputing; but such open blasphemers should be condemned without a hearing and without defense."  

Not only should public preaching not be allowed; neither should clandestine meetings be tolerated. Luther was particularly irate about these "sneaks" who went "uncalled and unsent, into peoples houses and emit their poison there before pastors or rulers find them out."  

It was the duty of citizens to report such people to the authorities; failing to do so "he is himself guilty and just as much a thief and rascal as the sneak himself."  

All should refuse to listen to such people even if they should be angels or even Gabriel himself. God permitted no one to decide the issue for himself; everything depended on the call. "If he wants

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24Ibid.  
25Ibid., p. 62.  
26Ibid., p. 64.  
27Ibid.
to preach or teach, let him give the proof of the call. . . .
If he does not want to do this, then let the rulers hand the
knave over to the right master, the police."28

Luther and the Wittenberg theologians urged the Elector of Saxony to enforce capital punishment against the tenacious
Anabaptists, not for reasons of religion, but because they were a threat to society.29 Luther ranted against the false
preachers. They had received no call to preach. "If they
came from God and were honest they would first of all repair
to the parish pastor and deal with him, making clear their
call and telling what they believed and asking for his per-
mission to preach publically."30 Luther was being most hypo-
critical. He knew their appearance would likely result in
death. Since they went ahead and preached without being
called, it was quite plain that they were of the devil.31
Luther plainly was no longer dealing with men, but with Satan.
It was Satan who was sneaking among the people spreading his
evil thoughts. Since all such evil acts could be attributed
to the devil, coercive acts were legitimate. It was in
God's interest to kill or burn devils. The full strength of
all authority, both spiritual and secular, could be focused
against false preachers in guise of the devil.

28Ibid., p. 66.  
29Mueller, p. 62.  
30Luther's Works, 40:384.  
Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues formulated an instrument in 1536 reaffirming the death penalty for those heretics whose teachings were opposed to the fundamental tenets of faith, even though they were not seditious. Thousands of Anabaptists died as a result of this policy during the course of the German Reformation, executed by Lutherans and Catholics alike.\(^{33}\)

Primarily, Luther was concerned with the visibility of the Anabaptists. Luther believed in the church invisible; the Anabaptists in the church visible, at work in the world. A church invisible does not have to define its dogma; it does not even admit that it is dogmatic. A visible church has to find its truth, define it, and take a dogmatic stance in order to preserve it. This Luther was unwilling to permit them to do for fear that Lutheran dogmatism would also have to be defined. If it could be defined, then its authority was open to attack.

In general, Luther opposed the Anabaptists on only one theological issue, that of infant baptism, although there were other points of doctrine in which they were not in agreement. Unable to refute them theologically or Scripturally regarding infant baptism, Luther invoked the tradition of the apostolic church as his authority for denying them freedom.


\(^{33}\)Mueller, pp. 66-67.
of religion. Most of Luther's attack on the Anabaptists centered on their life style, rather than theological issues. In them he found and equated blasphemy, heresy, and sedition: all tools of Satan. Luther used all the authority of the Lutheran church, backed by secular authorities, to deny them both personal freedom or freedom of religion, and even their lives.
CHAPTER VI

LUTHER AND THE SACRAMENTARIANS

Luther's unyielding attitude toward his fellow Protestants, those "Sacramentarians", had the most damaging effect on the Reformation. It is inconceivable that Luther could be unaware that he and the Sacramentarians had many similar views regarding theology; nor could he have failed to realize the necessity for some sort of unity among the Protestant groups in order to insure the success of the Reformation. Nevertheless, Luther was intractable over issues concerning the Eucharist, that other reformers considered to be only a difference "in words."¹ Luther insisted that the Word of God be interpreted in a literalistic manner in regard to Christ's words "This is my body." The Word of God, the sole authority in religious matters, stated unequivocally, in Luther's mind, that the corporeal presence of Christ was present in the Eucharist at the time of communion. The Sacramentarians interpreted Christ's words to have only a symbolic meaning. On this point Luther would never waver. The Word of God alone would be accepted as authority on this subject. The result was a permanent and disastrous breach within the Protestant groups.

¹Edwards, p. 86.
In almost every instance, those men Luther disparagingly referred to as "Sacramentarians" had been initial supporters of Luther in his battle with the Roman church. Even after their differences became apparent, they were perfectly willing to acknowledge the debt the Reformation owed to Luther's efforts, more than willing to accord him his place in history as the one who first had the courage to speak out against the abuses of the Roman church. Luther's views, in most instances, coincided with their own beliefs. They had no wish to discredit Luther; they simply refused to accord him the honor of believing that he was infallible, that he was incapable of error. They feared simpler people might be mislead simply because of Luther's brilliant reputation. Thus the conciliatory Martin Bucer, gently, but with a touch of sarcasm, observed that since Luther had been first to restore the gospel and had not erred in important matters, he believed himself incapable of being mistaken in anything.²

Ulrich Zwingli, Luther's foremost opponent in the controversy over the Eucharist, was well aware of Luther's tactic of using the authority of his reputation rather than discussing the real issues.

You always put forward first a long abusive section so that a simple person will be induced by your authority or name, in which he has much faith, to hate your opponents, and, as a result of such a temptation, he will not examine your unfounded opinion very carefully. . . .³

From the very beginning, then, Luther appeared to be intent on alienating all those influential men of good will who were receptive to his cause. His intractability and dogmatism were demeaning to the moderates and Humanists who had been applauding his call for freedom, and eventually were the cause of withdrawal of their support.

Luther's first opponent in the quarrel over the Eucharist was with his friend and colleague at the University of Wittenberg, Andreas Carlstadt, who had been moving forward with reforms in the church while Luther remained at Wartburg Castle. Carlstadt and others had moved too quickly to suit Luther, and he returned to take command. While dealing with the papists, Luther had been willing to sublimate his role in the conflict and play up the cause itself. Now, in order to bring the Reformation into a more conservative channel, to prevent conflict among the people, Luther began to assert his authority as God's chosen instrument, thereby making it a Lutheran cause.

Therefore, dear brethren, follow me! I have never been a destroyer. And I was also the very first whom God called to this work. . . . I was also the one to whom God first revealed that His Word should be preached to you. I am also sure that you have the pure Word of God.  

Luther and Carlstadt soon fell into disagreement with regard to the elements in the Eucharist. Carlstadt claimed that only bread and wine were present in the sacrament, rejecting both the Catholic belief in transubstantiation, and

4Luther's Works, 51:72-73.
Luther's own belief in consubstantiation, that the corporeal presence of Christ was present in the sacrament. Luther's alarm at the opinions held by Carlstadt and his unrelenting attitude, were in direct contradiction to his earlier sentiments on this subject.

I therefore permit every man to hold either of these views, as he chooses. My one concern at present is to remove all scruples of conscience, so that no one may fear to become guilty of heresy if he should believe in the presence of real bread and real wine on the altar, and that every one may feel at liberty to ponder, hold, and believe either one view or the other, without endangering his salvation.5

After their clash of wills, Carlstadt retired to his pastorate, where he continued to anger Luther with his writings and reform. Luther complained that Carlstadt was only motivated by a desire for fame. He planned to have Carlstadt recalled; and, failing that, "we shall bring charges against him before the Elector."6 Carlstadt's refusal to be instructed by Luther led Luther to associate him, by implication, with the "satanic spirit" at work in Munzer.7 When Carlstadt indignantly protested to the authorities, Luther questioned his certitude about his convictions. "If his actions are based on God's inspiration. . . . Why does he consult men? Here you realize how certain that wicked spirit

6Correspondence, Luther to Spalatin, March 14, 1524, 2:222.
7Edwards, p. 40.
is about his being driven by God in what he is doing."  

In September of 1524 Carlstadt was banished from Saxony, probably at Luther's instigation, although he denied responsibility. Upon hearing that Carlstadt had been in Strasbourg, Luther wrote the ministers there to beware, for Carlstadt's teachings were not true Christianity. "What is not to be borne is that he should say that all who did not do as he bade were not Christians, thereby binding freedom and conscience." Luther confessed that if anyone had been able to convince him that the sacrament contained only bread and wine, they would have been of great aid in his battle with the p

acy. "But I am a captive and cannot free myself. The text is too powerfully present, and will not allow itself to be torn from its meaning by mere verbiage." Even though the Strassburgers had refused to accept Carlstadt or his teachings, and had arrived at their own opinions regarding the Eucharist independently, Luther always held Carlstadt responsible for their heresy; they held the sacrament to be only a symbolic gesture. The Swiss too were tainted by Carlstadt's work. While delaying writing his book on the Eucharist until Carlstadt had finished pouring out his "poison",

8Luther's Works, Luther to Wolfgang Stein, Wittenberg, Beginning of September, 1524, 49:85.  
9Correspondence, Letter to the Christians of Strassburg, December 17, 1524, 2:278.  
10Ibid., p. 276.  
11Ibid., p. 278.  
12Luther's Works, 40:68.
Luther noted that "Among the Swiss, Zwingli at Zurich, and Leo Jud share the same opinion as Karlstadt, so widespread is this evil."\(^{13}\)

Luther's book on the Eucharist was a long epistle, which was as much an attack on Carlstadt as any logical presentation of his stand on the Eucharist. Carlstadt was "our worst enemy" with a "rebellious, murderous, seditious, spirit in him, which, if given an opportunity, would assert itself."\(^{14}\)

A most revealing reason for his resentment of Carlstadt appears in an account of their meeting in the city of Jena. Carlstadt had snapped his fingers at Luther, saying "You are nothing to me." Luther plaintively asks, "If he doesn't respect me, whom among us will he then respect."\(^{15}\) Carlstadt was not to be trusted because he played to the mob and carried a "murderous weapon", waiting only for the proper moment to use it.\(^{16}\) Carlstadt was only an opportunist guided by the devil.\(^{17}\) Luther dismissed him by saying "If Dr. Karlstadt believes there is any God in heaven or on earth, may Christ my Lord never more be merciful to me."\(^{18}\)

Luther found the same satanic spirit guiding the Zurich theologians. Sympathizing with the ministers there, he cautioned: "Do not be moved by Zwingli's argument concerning the certitude of faith, for he speaks of faith from hearsay

\(^{13}\)Ibid., Luther to Nicholas Hausman, Wittenberg, November 17, 1524, 49:88-90.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., 40:89. \(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 106. \(^{16}\)Ibid.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 157. \(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 212.
and imagination, and not from any experience."19 They were only repeating the arguments of Carlstadt.

Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and the Strassburg theologians differed on some points, but were in essential agreement in denying the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist, believing in a spiritual presence. Luther, predictably, lumped all his opponents together and noted, "This error about the sacraments has three sects, though they are all of one mind. . . . The conflicts among these sects are a sign that what they teach is of Satan, for the Spirit of God is not a God of dissension but of peace."20 A few months later he had discerned six separate heads or differing views among them, commenting that it must be a "wonderful spirit" guiding them that allowed such diverse agreement. "All these diverse spirits air their arguments in turn, all boast revelations obtained by prayers and tears, and all agree only on their conclusion. It is a good thing for us that Christ has made them fight each other from the beginning."21 Luther regarded their unharmonious, but debatable disputes, as an indication of their uncertainty; therefore they were most certainly satanically inspired. It never occurred to him

19Correspondence, Luther to Gottschalk Crusius at Celle, October 27, 1525, 2:339.


21Ibid., Luther to Spalatin at Altenberg, March 27, 1526, 2:366.368.
that his own doctrine was debatable. He had the truth. Luther's tracts directed against them were sullied by his personal acrimonies, and diminished the value of his theological concepts. The Strassburgers urged Luther to refrain from abuse, stressing that they did not abuse in kind.22

The Strassburgers, in an attempt to achieve peace and hoping to reconcile the two main opposing groups, sent Gregory Casel to talk with Luther.23 Luther replied that "either they or we must be ministers of Satan. There is no room here for negotiation or mediation."24 Luther knew which of the two groups were "ministers of Satan." Luther rarely even read their works before condemning their views. Even though he had not read Zwingli's Hyperaspites, Luther believed, "Zwingli is worthy of Holy hatred, so insolently and unworthily does he deal with the holy Word of God."25 Also, he had read neither Erasmus nor the Sacramentarians, but considered them Judases, because not only did the pope, emperor, Satan, and the whole world vie against him, but even those who should be his brothers only added to his sorrows. "It must be that one whom the world and its prince thus hates is pleasing to Christ."26

22Edwards, p. 86. 23Ibid., p. 87.
24Correspondence, Luther to Gregory Casel, November 5, 1525, 2:348.
25Ibid., Luther to Melanchthon in Jena, October 27, 1527, 2:419.
26Ibid., Luther to Justus Jonas at Nordhausen, November 11, 1527, 2:420-421.
Despite the efforts of the Strassburgers, no progress was made in reconciling the other groups with Luther. Landgrave Philip of Hesse, fearing repercussions from the emperor, felt that from the point of expediency, if not from piety, some form of compromise toward a "common confession of faith" must be attempted to reconcile the Protestant factions. Philip's solution was to arrange a meeting at his castle at Marburg. First he consulted Zwingli; then, knowing Luther's volatile nature, sent the Wittenbergers an invitation without letting Luther know that Zwingli would be present.27 Luther and the Wittenberg theologians opposed the meeting, but agreed to attend at the insistence of their Elector. Luther had opposed the Protestant alliance because it included those who were enemies of God and the Word, and Lutherans would be forced to fight for their evil deeds and blasphemy. Luther believed "no more dangerous alliance could be made to blaspheme and impede the gospel, and to condemn us, both soul and body. Unfortunately this is what the devil is after."28

Luther also told Philip of Hesse that no good could come of his effort unless he was able to encourage to others to abandon their opinion. Discussions would be of no avail with both sides intending to make no concessions.

Thus far I have found nothing other than that they want to insist on their position, though

27Schwiebert, p. 700.

they have become very familiar with the basis of our position. On the other hand, having also become familiar with the basis of their position, I certainly know that I am unable to yield, just as I know that they are wrong.\(^2\)

Certainly it was apparent from this correspondence that the results of the Colloquy would be negligible. Luther assumed from the beginning that the burden of proof would rest with the opposing groups, since they were there to challenge his unchangeable position. The discussions primarily centered on the Lord's Supper. Three days of discussion availed nothing. When asked to point out the error in their teaching, Luther declared himself to be neither their master, judge or teacher. They were of a completely different spirit "for it cannot be the same spirit when in one place the words of Christ are simply believed and in another place the same faith is censured, resisted, regarded as false and attacked with all kinds of malicious and blasphemous words."\(^3\)

He had accused the Strassburgers of not teaching any part of the Christian doctrine correctly. When asked to listen to their preaching and certify if they taught correctly, Luther coldly retorted that they were undependable and he would not judge them. "Since you do not want to accept me or my doctrine I cannot allow you to be my disciples."\(^3\)

Full capitulation to his gospel was all that Luther would accept.

\(^2\)Ibid., Luther to Landgrave Philip of Hesse, June 23, 1529, 49:231.

\(^3\)Ibid., 38:70. \(^3\)Ibid.
Given Luther's intractable nature and his previously stated disinclination to yield on any point, failure of the Colloquy was inevitable. Philip of Hesse asked that they consider themselves brethren, even if they still disagreed, but Luther wanted none of "this brother-and-member business." The Wittenbergers did not doubt the sincerity of the others in desiring fellowship and acknowledgment as brethren, but the Wittenbergers refused to accept them. Furthermore, "Even though they perceived that their arguments proved nothing, they were not willing to yield on the one point of the presence of the body of Christ. It was rather, as we think, from fear and shame than from malice. On all other points they yielded. . . ." To Luther, their yielding on fourteen other points did not mean concession or compromise, but rather a weakness in their convictions, which strengthened him in the correctness of his own doctrine. He felt he had humiliated his adversaries.

Martin Bucer spent the next six years trying to heal the schism. That he was highly unsuccessful was largely due to Luther's obdurate opposition to his efforts. Bucer and Melanchthon worked together in preparing the Protestant

32Ibid., Luther to Mrs. Martin Luther, October 4, 1529, 49:236.
33Correspondence, Luther to John Agricola in Saalfeld, Jena, October 12, 1529, 2:501.
34Luther's Works, Luther to Nicholas von Amsdorf, Wittenberg, October 27, 1529, 49:240.
position when the Pope was considering calling a general council in an attempt to reunite Catholic and Protestant groups. Luther questioned the sincerity of the other reformed theologians when their views were presented to him, even though they were similar to his own. In order to prove their sincerity, Luther demanded that they recant their belief in the symbolic nature of bread and wine and teach their people that the real body and blood of Christ were received in the Lord's Supper, by both the wicked and the pious. After several days of dispute, they acceded to Luther's demands, and the Wittenberg Concord was signed.

If any unity was achieved by this act, it was dictated by Luther and any agreement was reached on his own terms. Any idea of a unified Protestantism was only illusion. Luther had forced his terms upon other theologians, who had long suffered his abuse regarding their false teachings. The Concord failed to reconcile the Lutheran and Zwinglian factions. Furthermore, it split, rather than united, Zwinglians into two groups: the moderates followed Bucer into the Lutheran fold; the ultra-Zwinglian group continued to adhere to their own beliefs, cutting themselves off from

35Schwiebert, pp. 736-738.
38Hyma, p. 245.
the more moderate group. For Luther, though, it was a triumph. He had achieved accord in the true church, the only church, Luther's church. Through strength of will, Luther had asserted the authority of his own personality and his personal belief in the literalistic interpretation of the Word of God and forced the other Protestant groups to accept his authority. He had denied any freedom of conscience except his own.

39 Schtiebert, p. 739.
Luther's attitude toward the Jews was more ambivalent than to any group who refused to accept his Gospel. While he remained within the Church, Luther adhered to the sentiments of the typical medieval theologian, sharing the medieval stereotyped prejudices against the Jews. Having little actual knowledge of the true spirit of contemporary Jews, Luther based his conceptions on medieval folklore and anti-Jewish theological literature. The fifteenth century had been an age filled with anti-Jewish sentiment. Jews were considered to be the arch-heretics.\footnote{Joshua Trachtenberg, \textit{The Devil and the Jews} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), p. 217.} Luther reflected his time.

Luther took the stance that the Jews were unregenerate, that God had intended this to be so, as a lesson for the Gentiles, and that only God, not man, could bring about a change of heart in the Jews.\footnote{Lectures on Romans, p. 311.} \footnote{Correspondence, Luther to Spalatin, October 19, 1516, 1:29.} "I have come to the conclusion that the Jews will always curse and blaspheme God and his King Christ, as all the prophets have predicted."
Even when he voiced support during the Reuchlin controversy, regarding the revival of Hebrew literature and languages, his attitude was coldly theological, and his approval was in support of academic freedom, rather than Judaism.⁴

Luther's early sermons contain virulent passages regarding the Jews, chastising them for their obstinacy and failure to accept the Gospel and Jesus Christ, equating them with Turks and heretics.⁵ These sermons contained most of the abuses he would level against them in later years, though they were presented in a more scholarly form. His theme was that God had intentionally brought about the fall of the Jews in order that Gentiles might achieve salvation. God permitted the Jews to remain unregenerated as a warning to all Christians "in order that the good may shine all the more brightly in contrast to evil."⁶

Jews had committed a two-fold sacrilege. They had withdrawn "their heart and mind from the truth and the spirit," relying on their own understanding. Then they had distorted and given false meaning to the Scriptures.⁷ By adhering to their own superstitious religion and worshipping God according to their own false beliefs "they are worse than the ungodly..."⁸ Luther charged them with medieval anti-Jewish crimes, claiming "if they cannot overcome the messengers of

⁴Luther's Works, 47:126.  
⁵Lectures on Romans, 18:5.  
⁶Ibid., p. 30.  
⁷Ibid., p. 57.  
⁸Ibid., p. 306.
truth with curses and slanders, they go so far as to take steps to do away with them by murder in order that their own way of thinking may not be undone."

It would be wrong for Christians to tolerate such people.

Spalatin had asked for Luther's comments on the Reuchlin affair. Luther replied that he found nothing dangerous in Reuchlin's writing. At this time Luther appeared unwilling to commit himself to the controversy, but when his own cause was launched, he wrote Reuchlin that "I am one of those who longed to be with you, but had no opportunity. Yet I was always with you in prayer and fervent hope. But what was then denied me as your ally, has been granted to me as your successor in persecution." The major issue in the controversy, as far as Luther was concerned, was the preservation of Hebraic literature for scholarly purposes. Luther had no objection to the study of Hebrew as a guide to the understanding of the Scriptures. His intolerance was theologically based, not literary. His interest in Hebrew scholarship in no way mellowed his attitude toward Jewish obstinacy. Believing that theologians should return to the basic sources of the Scriptures, and that they needed the help of

9Ibid., p. 97.
10Correspondence, Luther to George Spalatin, Wittenberg, January or February, 1514, 1:28.
11Ibid., Luther to John Reuchlin, December 14, 1518, 1:138.
12Luther's Works, 47:126.
Jewish scholars in making accurate translations, Luther urged Spalatin to use his influence with the Elector to secure a teaching position for a Jewish scholar at the University of Wittenberg.\textsuperscript{13}

Through dialogue with Jewish scholars and visitors, Luther began to entertain the idea of mass conversion of Jews to Christianity. To a converted Jew he acknowledged that the process of "conversion of the Jews is in a bad odor almost everywhere," approved of by neither Christian nor Jew.\textsuperscript{14} He began to place the blame not on Jewish obstinacy, but on the lack of spiritual enlightenment by the papists. His enthusiasm was so overwhelming that he could envision that "when the golden light of the Gospel is rising and shining, there is hope that many of the Jews will be converted in earnest."\textsuperscript{15}

In that spirit and with that purpose in mind, Luther wrote the missionary tract \textit{That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew}. In contrast with the harshness of his prior attitude and of medieval attitudes in general, he dealt sympathetically with the Jewish problem. Luther's frankly stated aim was to convert Jews to Christianity by his interpretation of the Gospel and by social acceptance.\textsuperscript{16} Jews had been allowed to live in European lands as religious minorities, but were

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{13}Ibid., Luther to George Spalatin, Wittenberg, November 7, 1519, 48:132.
\item \textsuperscript{14}Correspondence, Luther to Bernard, A Converted Jew, May, 1523, 2:185.
\item \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 187.
\item \textsuperscript{16}Luther's Works, 45:200.
\end{enumerate}
ostracized and allowed no governmental privileges. Forced to live in areas not occupied by Christians, they formed an enclave that was naturally suspect by medieval society.\textsuperscript{17}

Luther's tract was a polemic against the papacy. He claimed the reason the Jews had not accepted the Gospel was not God's plan, but because the papists had failed to proclaim the true Gospel to them. He would correct the abuses of the papacy, by treating the Jews with brotherly love, rather than driving them away from Christianity, as had the papists, by treating them as "dogs rather than human beings." Treated as they had been, Luther "would sooner have become a hog than a Christian."\textsuperscript{18} If treated in the right way, Jews might be brought to accept Christ as the Messiah, and "after that they may drink wine, and learn also that He is true God."\textsuperscript{19} They must be treated gently and instructed in the Scripture. Luther would be lenient and sympathetic in regard to Jewish usury, for how could they do anything else "when we forbid them to labor and do business and have any human fellowship with us," and all other methods of earning a living being forbidden them.\textsuperscript{20} Christian love must be used in dealing with them rather than papal law. They must be allowed to trade and work among Christians in order that they might learn Christian teachings and observe Christian life. "If some of

\textsuperscript{17}Pauck, p. 253. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{18}Luther's Works. 45:200-201.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 229. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{20}Ibid.
them should prove stiffnecked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either."21

For a brief time Luther altered his teaching that it was God's will that the Jews remain unregenerated forever because of their obstinacy in failing to accept Christ. He thought that through the Gospel, God would accomplish what He had been heretofore disinclined to do. Enemies noted his Jewish sympathies and branded him "Jew" or "Half-Jew" and held him responsible for the rise of sectaries suspected of Judaizing.22 Luther's works caused some people to take a friendlier attitude toward the Jewish population, and some rulers, notably Landgrave Philip of Hesse, altered their anti-Jewish policies and permitted unhindered free passage through their lands.23 The Jews received Luther's tract with marked approval. Some regarded it as a sign of the coming of their Messiah. One of the greatest of the Kabbalists had high hopes and predicted that when Luther gained power, all Germany would be united.24

Luther's dream of a mass conversion was shortlived. Conversions were few, and Luther complained that Jews only

21 Ibid.
24 Neuman, p. 628-629.
When it became evident that his mission had failed, and worse, that the Jews were proselytizing among the Christians, Luther became their bitterest enemy. He returned to his earlier attitude toward them, but it was now couched in cruder and more violent language.26

Disheartened by failure and concluding that the devil could be converted easier than the Jews, Luther changed his tactics from leniency to uncompromising hostility. He was successful in rousing a number of German princes against the Jews in order to have them banished. "I intend to write against the Jews once again because I hear that some of our lords are befriending them. I'll advise them to chase all the Jews out of their lands."27 In 1536, Luther's Elector banished all Jews from Saxony, forbidding them to even pass through the land.28 This was probably done on the advice of Luther, who had heard of attempts by Jews to make converts of Christians in Moravia. Luther was convinced that the Jews were more at fault than the Christians.29

In a letter directed Against the Sabbatarians, his assault was against the Jews in an attempt to discredit them in the eyes of the Christians. The difficulty in converting Jews to Christianity lay in the stubbornness of their rabbis.

25Ibid., p. 629. 26Luther's Works, 47:60.
27Ibid., 54:426. 28Ibid., 47:61.
29Ibid., p. 60.
They had been in exile for over fifteen hundred years "due to their sins." God had destroyed Jerusalem because they failed to accept Christ as the true Messiah. They failed to keep their law, so they could no longer consider themselves Jews, because "He who would keep Moses' law must keep it in its entirety." Accordingly, Luther unceasingly headed a crusade against the menace of Judaism. He attacked any attempts at "Judaizing" with a tirade of violent abuse. In an unguarded comment on the idea of a Jew seeking baptism, Luther declared: "I would take him on to the bridge, tie a stone around his neck, and hurl him into the river; for these wretches are wont to make a jest of our religion." Upon receiving a request from Josel of Rosheim, one of the most prominent Jewish leaders in Germany, urging Luther to use his influence with the Elector to allow him safe passage through Saxony, Luther mused:

Why should these rascals, who injure people in body and property and who withdraw many Christians to their superstitions, be given permission. In Moravia they have circumcised many Christians and call them by the new name of Sabbatarians. This is what happens in those regions from which preachers of the gospel are expelled; there people are compelled to tolerate the Jews. However, I'll write this Jew not to return.

Luther declined to intercede for "his good friend Josel," because the Jews had misused his influence, having undertaken

31Ibid., p. 84.  
32Holmio, p. 189.  
33Luther's Works, 54:239.
to do things Christians were unable to put up with. Otherwise, he would have been willing to use his influence. "For my opinion was, and still is that one should treat the Jews in a kindly manner, that God may perhaps look graciously upon them and bring them to their Messiah—but not so that through my good will and influence they might be strengthened in their error and become still more bothersome." 34

Although it is evident from his final sermon that Luther never completely gave up hope of converting the Jews, the aging Luther wrote his most scurrilous attacks against the Jews in the mid-1540's. Concerning the Jews and Their Lies was such an infamous and merciless blast at the poor people, that one Lutheran scholar has commented that "One could wish that Luther had died before ever this tract was written." 35 In spite of its bitterness and hatred, it is evident that Luther was dealing with the Jewish problem from a religious rather than a racial point of view.

The tract was anything but an epistle of brotherly love. Luther had given up on converting them because "From their youth they have been so nurtured with venom and rancor against our Lord that there is no hope." 36 They were arrogant simply because they were Jews. Since they had cried and prayed and suffered for nearly fifteen hundred years and God still refused to listen, "They must assuredly be the base, whoring

34Ibid., 47:61. 35Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 297.

36Luther's Works, 47:139.
people, that is, no people of God, and their boast of lineage, circumcision, and law must be counted as filth."37 They had been instructed and refuted, so they were not merely mislead, they were "maliciously and willfully denying and blaspheming."38 Luther, who usually was inclined to lump all enemies in one group, felt the Jews belonged in a class by themselves, except for the devil. "Therefore, dear Christian, be advised and do not doubt that next to the devil, you have no more bitter enemy, venomous and vehement foe than a real Jew who earnestly seeks to be a Jew."39 He cited all the medieval stories of Jewish atrocities: well poisonings, kidnappings, and murders of Christian children. Implying this might possibly be all superstition, Luther claimed: "Whether it is true or not, I do know that they do not lack the complete, full, and ready will to do such things either secretly or openly where possible."40 Speaking to an attentive audience, Luther retracted any leniency toward usury, contending that Jews were merely "thieves and robbers who daily eat no morsel and wear no thread of clothing which they have not stolen and pilfered from us by means of their accursed usury. . . ."41 As such, they should be "hanged on the gallows seven times higher than other thieves."42

37Ibid., p. 167.
38Ibid., p. 184.
39Ibid., p. 217.
40Ibid.
41Ibid., p. 242.
42Ibid.
Luther denied that the Jews were captives in German lands. An open road lay before them and they were free to proceed to "their lands" at any time, because they were a heavy burden for the country. The methods Luther recommended in handling the Jewish problem included burning their synagogues, razing their homes, confiscating their theological works, forbidding rabbis to teach "on pain of loss of life and limb." Then safe-conduct must be abolished, usury banned, and all gold and silver confiscated, and young Jews were to be forced to manual labor in order to "earn their bread by the sweat of their brow." After that Luther recommended expulsion because "If we wish to wash our hands of the Jew's blasphemy and not share in their guilt, we have to part company with them. They must be driven from our country."

Fellow reformers and contemporary Jews were appalled by Luther's book. Important Rabbis of Germany wrote articles to refute Luther. Josel of Rosheim lamented that prior to this time no scholar had ever urged such tyrannical and exorbitant policies toward the Jews. Melanchthon disapproved of its severity, and Bullinger wrote Martin Bucer that the views expressed by Luther reminded him of the Inquisition.

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43 Ibid., pp. 268-270.  
44 Ibid., p. 270.  
46 Neuman, p. 628.  
48 Luther's Works, 47:123.
He found the work to be "swinish and filthy". Immediate repercussions resulted from the publication. Saxony and Neumark banished the Jews, and without giving them safe-conduct. Similar decrees were made by other rulers. The Elector August and Philip of Hesse restricted the privileges of the Jews. Bohemia banished them. It is possible that the 1555 decree forbidding the burial of Jews in Schmalkalden resulted from this work of Luther's.

Luther continued the pressure on the Jews in his letters and sermons until his death. Shortly before his death he wrote his wife that when the important affairs had been taken care of, he planned to try to expel the Jews. Count Albrecht did not like them, and had tried to deal with them, but had been unsuccessful. "If God will, I shall help Count Albrecht, and speak about them from the pulpit." He did just that in his final sermon. He still encouraged the Jews to accept Christ and be baptized, but he said that people would no longer tolerate their blasphemy, and threatened them with banishment. He died three days later.

Persecution and intolerance toward Jews has continued in Germany, as well as other European nations, both Catholic and Protestant, until the present time. In nineteenth-century Germany it was expressed by a form of scientific antisemitism that had its basis in Luther's works. That

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49 Holmio, p. 121. 
50 Ibid., p. 120. 
51 Holmio, p. 106. 
52 Ibid. 
53 Neuman, p. 629.
Luther's works contributed to the anti-Semitic developments during the last two centuries cannot be denied. That it was Luther's intent that they be so used in disparaging the Jews as a race is to malign him. Luther did not deliberately or intentionally encourage institutional, scientific, genocidal racism. Luther's sole aim was the conversion of the Jews to his own vision of the only true religion. Luther had dutifully instructed them in his truth. He had done so in the spirit of brotherly love. In their failure to accept his teachings, they thereby rejected the grace of God, for only through Luther's Gospel could they attain grace. They had lost their last chance at redemption. Henceforth, they were to be banished from the fellowship of Christianity and the Christian world.
Many modern people like to believe that they inherited their modern freedoms, both religious and personal, from the results of the revolt of Martin Luther against the Roman Catholic church in the sixteenth-century, thereby making Luther the herald of modernity and of the emerging secularism. If there is any truth in this myth, freedom was only a by-product of Luther's revolt, for Luther was not interested in the modern concept of individual freedom. He was seeking only the truth that would bind all men's souls, and assumed there was only one such truth. When he found it, Luther was willing to do anything necessary to preserve this truth. Luther developed a very authoritarian religion, based on the dogmatism of faith and the Word of God. Even Scripture was subjected to his Word. The Word was an active force working in the world; Scripture was the vehicle through which it came into being. Faith in the Word might hopefully lead to God's favoring an individual with divine grace and assured salvation.

Faith, being a very subjective, personal experience, was difficult to deal with, since it could not be subjected to proof. One either believed in the Word and was spiritually free, or did not believe and was unfree. From attempts to
solve this problem, a Protestant tradition arose that stressed probable rather than absolute certainty concerning articles of faith. According to Luther, each Christian was to be the infallible interpreter of divine truth; in this lay his freedom so long as he reached the same truth that Luther had discovered. His truth was absolute and unchanging. For Luther was a medieval man, and medieval men believed in absolute and eternal truths, truths that were unchanging.

Luther's adversaries were also medieval men. As various sects developed, they too, were searching for divine truth, and believed there could be only one. When they found their truth, they became just as rigid, exclusive, and dogmatic as Luther. Luther's revolt forced the Roman church to redefine its dogma, and after the Council of Trent, in response to the challenges to its authority, that dogma too was rigidly enforced. Any freedom of thought or speculation was sacrificed to security. Any questioning of the tenets of these varying truths was regarded as impiety, and the State, having been deemed by Luther to be a divinely sanctioned institution, was duty bound to suppress any dissent. Thus Luther's Reformation created a new dimension for society, that of hatred between Christians, based on subjective interpretations of theology, which had not been there before. Luther failed to build a unified church built on theology; instead he created dissension and confusion about the nature
of religion. Dissent and revolution became a way of life, resulting from this incertitude about the authority of opposing absolutes.

To medieval man, death was not a fearful thing; it was a blessed release from the harsh earthly bonds in a frightening, present world. Medieval man did not fear death, because through the sacramental system, he believed he could achieve salvation and a better life in the future world, by living a meritorious life in the present world. With Luther, salvation was in the present, was by no means a certainty, could not be achieved by any conscious effort on the part of man. Uncertainty about his salvation made man fearful of death. This unreachable God became more frightening than the avenging God of the medieval world, a God which could be appeased through man's own efforts. Fear of this omnipotent God, who was able, but did not necessarily dispense saving grace to meritorious man in preference to sinful man, caused man to begin to search for other absolutes in which to place his faith and quell his uncertainty.

Luther created a negative and pessimistic approach to life, authoritarian and dogmatic, with emphasis on sin, the depravity and helplessness of man. He created a dualistic world, dividing it into good and evil, leaving no neutral ground for people; they were either fighting for God or for Satan. Luther was a medieval man holding on to the medieval idea of God as the avenger of sin; through the atoning love
of Christ. Only thus was he able to justify his faith in the forgiving love of God. There was no such thing as religious freedom; man had to be constantly on his guard against Satan.

Luther was interested in God and in man's relationship to God, not in the freedom of man. He denied man any ability to think or act for himself; to do so was to reject God. Man was unable to exercise his reason in any way to obtain salvation. The dogma of faith became more important than reason or thought. The act of believing became more important than what one believed. Luther made no attempt to reconcile faith and reason. The foundations of faith were subjective and non-rational. Luther made faith into an exclusive dogma that drove out of the Church all speculative thinkers. Humanistic thinkers had looked for freedom instead of absolute truths. Although they believed eternal truths existed, they refused to define them. Luther looked for truth, and assuming there was only one, was willing to define that truth as God's eternal truth. The Reformation ended Renaissance thinking. After Luther, all humanists were so indoctrinated by either Catholicism or Protestantism that their humanism became only another tool to further dogmatic thinking, to find eternal truths.

Modern man is a man in search of authority rather than freedom. He searches for an alternative authority to the Church to become the receptacle of his faith. He has adopted the authoritarian, pessimistic world view of Luther, a
dualistic world, divided into absolutes. Torn among opposing faiths and ideologies, man searches for dogmatic solutions, and eternal truths, because he is a product of the Reformation. He looks for good and evil in all he encounters. He looks for God and Satan. Like Luther, modern man is able to detect Satan and evil, based on his own personal experience and personal tastes. Good, like Luther's God, is less easily determined and defined. Thus in his incertitude, modern man turns to other authorities to take the responsibility for determining the good, and to receive his faith, to be responsible for his salvation.

Christianity lost its efficacy when Luther brought into question the nature of what constituted Christian faith and the importance of religion itself. With the lessening of the importance of the Church, man's spiritual nature, longing for a faith in which to believe, has been channeled into other areas as substitutes for the loss of Christian faith. Man's longing for an absolute in which to place his faith led him to accept the authority of the state as a divinity, a medium upon which he relies to define his truths, and be responsible for his actions; for since Luther, man no longer has to be responsible for his actions. The truths man derives from the state are just as subjective and dogmatic as those of Luther. Freedom is limited to adherence to those truths. Deviation or dissent from that authority is to be punished by withdrawal of freedom. Thus the modern
world has become more tolerant religiously, but less tolerant politically.

Speculative thought is suspect to the modern world, just as it was suspect to Luther. In the realms of organized religion, speculation is considered to be skeptical or anti-Christian. Speculation in relation to the state is considered heretical and unpatriotic. Modern humanists and thinkers are problem solvers, searching still for eternal truths. When these truths are determined, they become new dogmas, backed by the prejudices of specific disciplines, with data gathered to substantiate their absolutes. Speculative thinking might destroy their absolutes. Freedom of thought is curtailed by their dependence on adherence to their eternal truths.
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