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### Albrecht Durer and the Lutheran Reformation

William Scar

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir\_scarw@csl.edu

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ALBRECHT DÜRER  
AND  
THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

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by

William Scar

July 1945

Approved by: L. Fuhrbringer  
W. G. P. Olson

ALBRECHT DÜRER  
AND  
THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION  
(Outline)

Controlling Purpose: TABLE OF CONTENTS his paper is to show  
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    C. What others have said about Durer.

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Kunst by Moriz Thausing.

## ALBRECHT DÜRER

AND

### THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

This dissertation is a study of Albrecht Dürer's life and work with a theological interest. This is in no way a complete discussion of the artist's life and works. The selection of works treated in chapter four is not a good cross section of his drawings, woodcuts, copper engravings, etchings, and paintings. They are a careful selection of his works of art showing how he gradually employed true Christian or Biblical teaching in his religious subjects. The author endeavors to show in this paper that Albrecht Dürer made a contribution to the work of Martin Luther and his associates as a preparatory figure to the reform movement and how later the work of Martin Luther influenced the great German artist.

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Albrecht Dürer by Mrs. Charles Heaton; Albrecht Dürer by  
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The world of Medieval Europe was prepared for the coming of Martin Luther. There were many things which led the people of that age to welcome the Reformer. Some notable historians even trace some elements which prepared Europe for reform back to Charles the Great. The Albigenses contributed much to undermining the dogmatic authority of the organized Church. At least some people began to look for themselves. They began to ask, "Why?" and, "What is the authority that says so?" Humanism as part of the Renaissance movement gave Martin Luther a critical text of the Old Testament Hebrew and of the New Testament Greek. The 15th Century's greatest invention, the printing press, was possible wide and quick dissemination of the new and shocking ideas of Martin Luther as he became conscious of the Christian doctrine based on the Revelation of God. The universities of the time were already questioning Rome's authority.

The Albigenses and the Waldenses were reform movements before the year 1200. Marsilio of Padua, William of Ockham, John Gerson, John Wycliffe, John Hus, John Wessel, and Girolamo Savonarola are some of the men who can be classed as "pre-reformers."

The German government was also prepared for the Reformation of Luther. The Holy Roman Emperor did not have absolute control over I. Background. Each king and prince were in reality sovereign over their own principality. That

The world of Medieval Europe was prepared for the coming of Martin Luther. There were many things which led the people of that age to welcome the Reformer. Some reputable historians even trace some elements which prepared Europe for reform back to Charles the Great. The Renaissance contributed much to undermine the dogmatical authority of the organized Church. At least some people began to think for themselves. They began to ask, "Why?" and, "Who is the authority that says so?" Humanism as part of the Renaissance movement gave Martin Luther a critical text of the Old Testament Hebrew and of the New Testament Greek. The 15th Century's greatest invention, the printing press, made possible wide and quick dissemination of the new and shocking ideas of Martin Luther as he became conscious of true Christian doctrine based on the Revelation of God. The universities of the time were already questioning Rome's authority.

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The German government was also prepared for the Reformation of Luther. The Holy Roman Emperor did not have absolute control over his vast empire. Each king and prince were in reality sovereign over their own principality. That is why the emperor could not suppress the Lutheran Reformation by force. An ideal prince was ruling Saxony when Luther flourished.

Frederick was precisely the prince required at the beginning of the Reformation. Too much weakness on the part of the friends of this work would have allowed of its being crushed. Too much precipitation would have made the storm burst forth sooner, which from its very commencement began to gather in secret against it. Frederick was moderate, but firm. He possessed that virtue which God requires at all times in those who love His ways: he waited for God. He put in practice the wise counsel of Gamaliel: 'If this work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.' Acts 5: 38, 39. 'Things are come to such a pass,' said this prince to Spengler of Nuremberg, one of the most enlightened men of his day, 'that man can do no more; God alone must act. For this reason we place in His powerful hands these mighty works that are too difficult for us.' Providence claims our admiration in the choice it made of such a ruler to protect its rising work.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that true Christianity was not very prevalent in Germany before the time of Luther. But as in all ages of the world there are always true believers in Christ wherever the Gospel is even if it is masked and clouded by heretical teachings. Before Luther there were isolated groups of

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1. J. H. D'Aubigné, History of the Reformation, p. 77.



Christians. D'Aubigné in his History of the Reformation points out this fact and also says that the German people as a group of people were prepared to receive the true Christian doctrines of Luther.

Meanwhile the religion of Jesus Christ had exerted on Germany its appropriate influence. The third estate, the commonalty, had rapidly advanced. In the different parts of the empire, particularly in the free cities, numerous institutions arose calculated to develop this imposing mass of the people. There the arts flourished: the burghers devoted themselves in security to the tranquil labors and sweet relations of social life. They became more and more accessible to information. Thus they daily acquired greater respect and influence. It was not magistrates, who are often compelled to adapt their conduct to the political exigencies of the times; or nobles, passionately fond of military glory above all things; or an ambitious and greedy priesthood, trading with religion as its peculiar property, that were to found the reformation in Germany. It was to be the work of the middle classes--of the people--of the whole nation.

The peculiar character of the Germans seemed especially favorable to a religious reformation. They had not been enervated by a false civilization. The precious seeds that the fear of God deposits among a people had not been scattered to the winds. Ancient manners still survived. In Germany was found that uprightness, fidelity, and industry--that perseverance and religious disposition, which still flourish there, and which promise greater success to the Gospel than the fickle, scornful, and sensual character of other European nations.<sup>2</sup>

All this made it possible that there was a reforming element in the expression of the art of Germany before Luther. The

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2. J. H. D'Aubigné, op. cit., pp. 60. 31.

works of Albrecht Dürer are a part of this.

The first fruits of an independent spirit were in Germany. "Unabhängig von vorwärts treibenden, aus den alten Fesseln sich losrigendend Volksgeiste haben also Holzschnitt und Kupferstich in Deutschland ihre erste Blüthe entfaltet."<sup>3</sup>

This is where the work of the artists of the time fit in.

The works of Albrecht Dürer make up an important part of these "first fruits."

Not only was Germany as a whole somewhat prepared to receive the reform ideas of Luther, but particularly the free city of Nürnberg was a city in which new and different ideas had freedom for expression. This was especially true in religious matters.

Wie die Stadt das ganze Mittelalter hindurch im Kampfe gegen das Papstthum am Kaiser festhielt, so hatte sich in ihrer Bürgerschaft bei aller tiefen Frömmigkeit eine freiere Richtung in kirchlichen Dingen festgesetzt. Schon die Ansichten der Waldenser hatten sich bis hieher verirrt, zu der Gesellschaft der Gottesfreunde im XIV. Jahrhundert gehörten auch mehrere Nürnberger, und vollends die hussitischen Lehren fanden alsbald Anklang in der Stadt. Johann Huss erzählt selbst, wie er auf seiner Durchreise nach Constanz von allem Volke in Nürnberg erwartet wurde und wie er dann öffentlich unter dem einstimmigen Beifalle der Bürger seine Lehrsätze entwickelt habe. Die Nürnberger Geistlichkeit stand in einem untergeordneten Verhältnisse zu der Bürgerschaft. Der Rath hatte die Advocatie und schliesslich auch das Patronat von sämtlichen Kirchen und Klöstern in der Stadt und in dem ihr zugehörigen Gebiete; er wählte die Pröbste und Pfarrer trotz dem Widerspruche des Bischofs von Bamberg, in dessen Sprengel sie gehörten; er führte die Aussicht über die Sitten der Klöster und reformierte dieselben auch gegen

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3. Moriz Thausing, Dürer, Geschichte seines Lebens und seiner Kunst, p. 15.

den Willen der Mönche und Nonnen; so 1428 das Katharinenkloster, 1436 das der Augustiner. So kam es denn, dass die Reformation bei ihrem Eintritte vielleicht in keiner deutschen Stadt den Boden so vorbereitet fand, wie in Nürnberg.<sup>4</sup>

William Martin Conway in his Literary Remains of Albrecht Dürer in speaking of the home of the artist says,

Nürnberg was one of the first German towns to feel the coming Reformation. Changes of opinion in foreign parts could not but affect a town situated as she was. Her sons were travellers. Her commerce overspread Europe. Many of her merchants had houses of business in distant cities. The young men of the upper classes went to Italy to complete their education; apprentices who had served their time were urged to go away from home for three or four years before seeking admittance to the mastership of their craft. Any European movement was likely to affect the Franconian city. A movement of revolt against the corruption of lazy monks and a dissolute Curia was sure to meet with warm support from industrious merchants and workmen. The Nürnbergers too had their own causes of complaint against the Papacy, for more than one Pope had swindled them of their hard-earned florins on specious pretexts. Like Venice, Nürnberg had always kept the clergy in more or less subjection. The town Council held the patronage of the churches and retained a firm control over the convents; and it is significant that some of the earliest recorded municipal legislation was directed against encroachments by the clerical power.<sup>5</sup>

Richard Ford Heath in his monograph, Albrecht Dürer, says that Nürnberg was the only place where a man like Dürer could have expressed his new ideas.

4. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., p. 25.  
5. p. 17.

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When in 1495 an imperial council was considering the grievances of the people, the Pope issued a decree against publishing unauthorized books, for he discovered in German literature a force which was springing up to push him from his seat. There was a realm, however, which he left unnoticed--the domain of art. While he adorned his palace with the splendours of the Renaissance, insignificant German wood-cuts were undermining the Papal system by speaking everywhere to multitudes whom writings could not reach. In the front of the aggressive artists came Wolgemut with his Papst-Esel (Pope's-ass), in 1496. It is inscribed 'Roma caput mundi.' On the left is the Castle of Sant' Angelo with a flag over it, bearing the keys as a device; on the right the Torre di Nona, and between them the Tiber. In the centre is a female monster covered with scales. She has the foot of a goat and the claw of a vulture; her left hand is stretched out to clutch; a cat's paw serves for her right. From under a mask shoots out a tail, sprouting into a dragon's head, and between the shoulders is that of an ass. Only under the rule of the patricians of Nürnberg could this little copper-plate have appeared.<sup>6</sup>

Nürnberg was the first city to declare itself officially on the side of the Lutheran Reformation. That was the home of Albrecht Dürer. Its progressive ideas undoubtedly influenced the thinking of Albrecht Dürer. As with all men, he too was a child of his age and environment. But observe what a home it was. It wasn't the average town of the Middle Ages in any sense. It was a thinking city. It was a progressive city. Its commerce extended to all parts of Europe. Its manufactured goods found their way through the harbors of Europe to other continents. All this says that it was possible for a Christian man whose work was art to express

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6. p. 24.

his Christian principles in opposition to the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the time, and Dürer did.

These revolutionary ideas found their expression in all of German culture of the period before Luther. However, since the German literary language had not yet reached its full development, the field of culture that expressed these ideas in particular was the visual arts: painting and the various methods of engraving. In this Albrecht Dürer was not the first, but he was the chief.

During this period it was developed to its highest form.

Freilich liegt in dieser Begeisterung noch jetzt viel Romantik. Wie kleinlich und spielbürgerlich erscheint Deutschland gegenüber dem grossen Schwung, der durch die Republiken Italiens ging. Maximilian, der letzte Ritter, gibt zwar allerhand Aufträge, aber bei den geringen Mitteln, über die er verfügt, bleiben sie in ganz bescheidenen Grenzen. Der Erzbischof Albrecht von Mainz denkt im Stil der italienischen Meccene, aber die Wirren der Reformation hindern ihn bald in seinen Plänen. Und was die Fugger, die Imhoff, die Holzschuher entstehen lassen, wie gering und ärmlich erscheint es, wenn man an die Medici, die Tornabuoni und Pazzi denkt. Die deutsche Kunst wäre nach wie vor zünftiges Handwerk geblieben, hätte sich begnügen müssen, durch Altarbilder Religionsunterricht zu erteilen, wenn nicht die Künstler selbst nach Mitteln gesucht hätten, sich auf den Fittichen des Genius über Zeit und Welt zu erheben.<sup>7</sup>

Albrecht Dürer the Elder was a gold-

Other art authorities say the following about art before the Reformation and the place that Dürer has in it.

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7. Richard Muther, Geschichte der Malerei, Vol. II, pp. 125.126.

8. Richard Ford Heath, op. cit., p. 13.

Passing from the shadowy names and half-obliterated works of these early schools, we stay for a moment on the very brink of that Reformation which was to do so much both of good and evil for Religion and for Art, to recall some Masters who, though living before Luther, and still under the discipline of the Roman Church, yet began to think for themselves, and to give signs of that new era of art of which Albrecht Dürer and Holbein are the exponents.<sup>8</sup>

The period in which Dürer lived was one of development for various types of visual art. The woodcut was known before. We do not know who was the first to use this medium. During this period it was developed to its highest form. We do not know who it was that introduced the art of woodcut to Nürnberg. We do know who introduced copper-engraving to Nürnberg. It was Wohlgenut, the artist for whom Dürer served as an apprentice. It is significant to us that Dürer studied under such a man. We know not only from this but from other facts that Wohlgenut was a leader in his field. He was a man constantly striving for new ways and methods of expression. Perhaps Dürer acquired this same spirit from this teacher.

Dürer received a few years of schooling. Then he became his father's apprentice. Albrecht Durer the Elder was a goldsmith. From his father young Albrecht received two things. The first was the rudiments of engraving. The father had received his own training with the great masters in the Netherlands. The father served as an intermediary between those

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8. Richard Ford Heath, op. cit., p. 13.

great masters and his son. "Young Dürer was brought up in the worship and, to some measure, in the tradition of Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden and must have longed to familiarize himself with this tradition at its very source."<sup>9</sup> This desire is the second thing Albrecht received from his father.

While doing the mechanical work in his father's shop Dürer became aware of his innate desire and ability to paint. Finally he received his father's permission to be apprenticed to a workshop of a painter. In 1486 at the age of fifteen he became the apprentice of Michael Wohlgemut. "In addition to what Dürer could learn from Nuremberg artists, he was naturally subject to what ever outside influences might reach him through drawings and particularly through prints. Chief among these were the engravings of Martin Schöngauer, the great master of Colmar in Alsace, and the dry points of the Housebook Master, who practiced his spirited and entirely original art chiefly in the Middle Rhenish region."<sup>10</sup>

Dürer finished his apprenticeship under Wohlgemut in 1490. Then it seems that he was to go to study under Schöngauer, but he arrived too late. Schöngauer died in 1491. Even Schöngauer already expressed a tendency for freedom from the Papal power.

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9. Erwin Panofsky, Albrecht Dürer, Vol. I, p. 4.

10. Erwin Panofsky, op. cit., p. 5.

11. Mrs. Charles Heston, The History of the Life of Albrecht Dürer, p. 42.

Martin Schöngauer and Michael Wohlgemuth stand, indeed, at an important transition period in Germany. They are the last of the old and the first of the new school of German art. They still, it is true, adhered with faithful hearts to the old forms of belief, and piously sought to interpret to the people in pictorial shape the doctrines and belief of the Church of Rome; but in spite of their unquestioning obedience to the voice of St. Peter, the germ of a new idea was already working in their art; and in the works of Martin Schöngauer especially, mingled with their pure Catholic devotion, we constantly perceive the cropping up of that strange new growth of freedom and reform which was destined to reach its real significance and noblest height in art in the works of Albrecht Dürer.<sup>11</sup>

Albrecht Dürer was not the first to voice ideas through art in opposition to the Papacy. It seems that in Nürnberg there was much questioning of Rome's authority. The thinking artists of the time spread these ideas.

Dürer spent the period from 1490 to 1494 in journeying. Soon after his return he was married to Agnes Frey according to the plan of his parents and hers.

Dürer wrote this account of his mother's life and death in 1514.

"Now you must know that in the year 1513, on a Tuesday in Crossweek, my poor unhappy mother, whom I had taken under my charge two years after my father's death, because she was then quite poor, and who had lived with me for nine years, was taken ill unto death (töttlich Kranck) on one morning early, so that we had to break open her room, for we knew not, as she could not get up, what to do. So we bore her down into a room, and she had the sacraments in both kinds administered to her, for every one thought that she was going to die,

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11. Mrs. Charles Heaton, The History of the Life of Albrecht Dürer, p. 42.



for she had been failing in health ever since my father's death, and her custom was to go often to church; and she always punished me when I did not act rightly, and she always took great care to keep me and my brothers from sin, and whether I went in or out, her constant word was 'In the name of Christ,' and with great diligence she constantly gave us holy exhortations, and had great care over our souls. And her good works, and the loving compassion that she showed to every one, I can never sufficiently set forth to her praise.

"Thus my good mother bore and brought up eighteen children; she has often had the pestilence and many other dangerous and remarkable illnesses; has suffered great poverty, scoffing, disparagement, spiteful words, fears, and great reverses. Yet she has never been revengeful. A year after the day on which she was first taken ill, that is, in the year 1514 on a Tuesday, the 17th day of May, two hours before midnight, my pious mother Barbara Dürerin departed in a Christian manner with all sacraments, absolved by Papal power from pain and sin. She gave me her blessing and desired for me God's peace, and that I should keep myself from evil. And she desired also before drinking (i. e. the sacramental wine) St. John's blessing which she had, she said she was not afraid to come before God. But she died hard, and I perceived that she saw something terrible, for she kept hold of the holy water, and did not speak for a long time. I saw also how death came and gave her two great blows on the heart, and how she shut her eyes and mouth and departed in great sorrow. I prayed for her, and had such great grief for her that I can never express. God be gracious to her! Her greatest joy was always to speak of God and to do all to His honour and glory. And she was sixty-three years old when she died, and I buried her honourably according to my means. God the Lord grant that I also make a blessed end, and that God with His heavenly hosts and my father, mother, and friend, be present at my end, and that the Almighty God grant us eternal life. Amen. And in her death she was still more lovely than she was in her life."<sup>12</sup>

Undoubtedly his mother had some influence on Dürer to make him deeply conscious of his spiritual needs.

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12. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., pp. 96.97.

Authorities disagree in their opinions of Dürer's wife, Agnes. Not enough is known to determine whether she was a good wife for Dürer or not. Some say that she was almost the worst possible wife for Dürer. They base their supposition on a statement of Pirkheimer which he probably made in a fit of anger. He had such fits of anger rather frequently. Others say that she was an excellent wife for Dürer. They base their supposition chiefly upon Melancthon's high praise of her. After Dürer's death Agnes gave part of Durer's wealth to the University of Wittenberg to establish a theological scholarship. It was in response to this gift that Melancthon praised the wife of Dürer. I think the truth lies in between the opposing views. Agnes was a very practical woman. At times she probably did not appreciate her husband's work and life as the great German artist.

long before Dürer. Many artists before Durer had already used this medium to reach the popular public. Cheap prints were popular. They sold well. They were a good source of income to the artist. However, before the time of Dürer this medium had not become a noble art. Dürer made the art of woodcut a noble art. He set a standard of perfection which has never been surpassed.

The art of wood-engraving had risen little above the level of a mechanical craft until the time of Koberger,

1. Norman Gundersheimer, "Dürer's Woodcuts and Engravings on Exhibition," The American-German Review, December, 1942, pp. 29, 30.

who first called in the assistance of superior draughtsmen. It was Dürer, however, who by perfecting the skill of the wood-engraver and by means of his own admirable designs on the woodblock first brought the art to such high a level. **II. The Great Artist** Before his time, the woodcut as a separate picture in black and white, independent of colour, unaccompanied by explanatory text, and used for ornamental and not for mere

Generally speaking, the rule is: the greater the man, the greater his influence upon others. In this chapter we will find out wherein Dürer was a great artist, what his contribution was to art, and how much he influenced other artists of his own day and later. The following general statement appeared in a leading magazine. "In his work the achievements of previous generations are considered to have found a climax. His personal contribution is understood to have influenced decisively the thought and expression of later times."<sup>1</sup>

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Another author puts the Apocalypse of Dürer on a plane with one of the greatest pieces of art of all times.

Like Leonardo's Last Supper, Dürer's Apocalypse belongs among what may be called the inescapable works of art. Summarizing, yet surpassing an age-old tradition, these works command an authority which no later artist could or can ignore, except perhaps by way of a deliberate opposition which in itself is another form of dependence. Dürer's compositions were copied, not only in Germany but also in Italy, in France and in Russia, and not only in woodcuts and engravings but also in paintings, reliefs, tapestries and enamels. Their indirect influence, transmitted by a master like Holbein, as well as by such modest craftsmen as the illustrators of the Luther Bibles, reached even the monasteries of Mount Athos.<sup>3</sup>

It was undoubtedly the influence of the Renaissance upon Dürer, but nevertheless he was also an innovator in a field of painting. He was the first to paint landscape by itself and for the beauty of itself. Richard Ford Heath calls Durer the father of independent modern landscape painting.<sup>4</sup>

2. Lionel Cust, Albrecht Dürer, Vol. I, p. 30.

3. Erwin Panofsky, op. cit., p. 59.

4. op. cit., p. 15.

Albrecht Dürer was also an architect. During his journey and stay in the Netherlands he drew plans for a house which the chief physician of the Archduchess Margaret intended to build.

Einen Beleg für Dürers Ruf als Architekt liefert auch noch der humoristische Brief von Charitas, der gelehrten Schwester Pirkheimers, der Aebtissin bei S. Clara an die Abgesandten Nurnbergs auf dem Reichstage zu Augsburg 1518. Darin heisst es von Durer: "Desgleichen mag auch Herr Albrecht Dürer, der ein Zeichenmeister und Ingeniosus ist, die Ordensgebäude zur Genüge wohl ansehen; wenn wir dereinst unseren Chor anders bauen würden, dass er dann Hilfe und Rath zu geben wisse, um weite Schlupf-fenster zu machen, auf dass uns die Augen nicht gar erblinden." Wir wissen aber nicht, wo und ob sich Dürer als Baumeister praktisch bethätigt hat.<sup>5</sup>

The following is an account of an interesting story of Dürer's association with the artist Giovanni Bellini. It indicates what great skill Dürer had in painting. This quotation is taken from the preface by Camerarius to Dürer's, Four Books of Human Proportions. This was published after Dürer's death.

What shall I say of the steadiness and exactitude of his hand? You might swear that rule, square, or compasses had been employed to draw lines, which he, in fact, drew with the brush, or very often with pencil or pen, unaided by artificial means, to the great marvel of those who watched him. Why should I tell how his hand so closely followed the ideas of his mind that, in a moment, he often dashed upon paper, or, as painters

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5. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., p. 314.

say, composed sketches of every kind of thing with pencil or pen? I see I shall not be believed by my readers when I relate, that some times he would draw separately, not only the different parts of a composition, but even the different parts of bodies, which, when joined together, agreed with one another so well that nothing could have fitted better. In fact this consummate artist's mind, endowed with all knowledge and understanding of the truth and of the agreement of the parts one with another, governed and guided his hand and bade it trust to itself without any other aids. With like accuracy he held the brush, wherewith he drew the smallest things on canvas or wood without sketching them in beforehand, so that, far from giving ground for blame, they always won the highest praise. And this was a subject of greatest wonder to most distinguished painters, who, from their own great experience, could understand the difficulty of the thing.

I cannot forbear to tell, in this place, the story of what happened between him and Giovanni Bellini. Bellini had the highest reputation as a painter at Venice and indeed throughout all Italy. When Albrecht was there he easily became intimate with him, and both artists naturally began to show one another specimens of their skill. Albrecht frankly admired and made much of all Bellini's works. Bellini also candidly expressed his admiration of various features of Albrecht's skill and particularly the fineness and delicacy with which he drew hairs. It chanced one day that they were talking about art, and when their conversation was done Bellini said: "Will you be so kind, Albrecht, as to gratify a friend in a small matter?" "You shall soon see," says Albrecht, "if you will ask of me anything I can do for you." Then says Bellini: "I want you to make me a present of one of the brushes with which you draw hairs." Dürer at once produced several, just like other brushes, and, in fact, of the kind Bellini himself used, and told him to choose those he liked best, or to take them all if he would. But Bellini, thinking he was misunderstood, said: "No, I don't mean these but the ones with which you draw several hairs with one stroke; they must be rather spread out and more divided, otherwise in a long sweep such regularity of curvature and distance could not be preserved." "I use no other than these," says Albrecht, "and to prove it, you may watch me." Then, taking up one of the same brushes, he drew some very long wavy tresses, such as women generally wear, in the most regular order and symmetry. Bellini looked

on wondering, and afterwards confessed to many that no human being could have convinced him by report of the truth of that which he had seen with his own eyes.<sup>6</sup>

Lionel Cust quotes Erasmus in making the following statement about Dürer's skill as an artist.

Erasmus writes of Dürer's woodcuts as follows:  
 "Apelles, it is true, made use of few and unobtrusive colours; while Dürer, admirable as he is too in other respects, what can he not express with one single colour--that is to say, with black lines? He can give the effect of light and shade, brightness, foreground and background. Moreover, he reproduces not merely the natural look of a thing, but also observes the laws of perfect symmetry and harmony with regard to the position of it. He can also transfer, by enchantment, so to say, upon the canvas things which it seems not possible to represent, such as fire, sunbeams, storms, lightning, and mist; he can portray every passion, show us the whole soul of man shining through his outward form, nay, even make us hear his very speech. All this he brings so happily before the eye with those black lines that the picture would lose by being clothed in colour. Is it not more worth admiration to achieve without the winning charm of colour what Apelles only realized with its assistance?"<sup>7</sup>

Dürer was the first to draw an interior full of light and warmth. He used this ability in his drawing of St. Jerome.<sup>8</sup>

Dürer had the skill for drawing and painting any subject he wanted. He was equal to any painter of his time, and he was far ahead of any other woodcut artist or engraver.

6. William Martin Conway, *op. cit.*, p. 138 and ff.

7. *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 82-85.

8. Friedrich Nuchter, *Albrecht Dürer*, p. 71.

However, he is at his best, "when he applies himself to distilling piety and pity out of the narrative of the Passion, turning the whole of the gospel story, as it were, into Stations of the Cross."<sup>9</sup>

In Dürer's travel throughout Germany and in Italy and the Netherlands he became acquainted with many of the leading artists of the time. His association with Giovanni Bellini has already been mentioned. It was Barbari of Italy who first introduced Dürer to the proportions and measurements of the human body as a subject for study.<sup>10</sup> Later Dürer wrote four books on this subject. Dürer and Raphael exchanged pictures, and it is interesting to note that each admired the other's and could not praise the work of the other high enough.<sup>11</sup>

The following shows that Dürer was really considered as a great rival by the leading artists of Italy.

It is noteworthy, however, that he is warned by his good friends (gut Gesellen: Dürer calls all his acquaintance--whether gentlemen or workmen, gut Gesellen) not to eat or drink with his brother artists. This reveals a dark current running beneath the brilliant surface of Venetian society in the sixteenth century. Assassination and poisoning were indeed the means frequently made use of to extinguish rivalry either in art or love.<sup>12</sup>

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9. J. P. Collins, "Four Centuries of Dürer," The Nineteenth Century and After, April, 1928, p. 541.

10. Lionel Cust, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 19.

11. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 98.

12. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 73.



At Antwerp Dürer became acquainted with Erasmus and astronomer, Nicolaus Kratzer.<sup>13</sup> Dürer's works were freely, widely, and illegally copied. This alone would prove that he was considered a great artist by contemporary fellow artists.

Next after Marc Antonio, the most distinguished copyists of Dürer's works are Virgil Solis, an excellent engraver of Nürnberg, who usually signed his copies with his own initials, Hieronymus Wierx, whose faithful reproductions are well known, J. C. Vischer, Ulrich Kraus, Martin Rota, Joh. van Coosen, Hieronymus and Lambert Hopfer, and Erhard Schön. ----- Suffice it to say that Heller gives a list of more than three hundred artists who worked after Dürer (Künstler welche nach Durer arbeiteten), and he often enumerates as many as seventeen copies of one engraving.<sup>14</sup>

Heller was one of the early biographers of Albrecht Dürer.

Pupils and followers of Dürer are: Hans Burckmair, Hans Fuss, Hans Leonhardt Schaufelin, Albrecht Altdorfer, Barthel Beham, Hans Sebald Beham, Georg Penoy, Heinrich Aldegrever, Jacob Bink, Hans Brosamer, Virgilius Solis, Jost Amman, Theodor De Bry.<sup>15</sup>

Another indication of the greatness of Dürer as a great artist is the many books he wrote in later life. He was a very versatile man as the list of subjects about which he wrote shows. He wrote 150 books on civil architecture, music,

13. Richard Ford Heath, op. cit., p. 64.

14. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 145.

15. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 145.

fortification of towns, castles, villages, proportions of the horse, art of fencing, landscape painting, colors, and painting. At the time of his death he was meditating on an important work on perspective. Only two works were published before his death. His most important work, the Book of Human Proportions was published after his death in 1528.<sup>16</sup>

I think Erwin Panofsky's comment about Dürer's writing extremely interesting.

Dürer was the first artist who, brought up in late-medieval workshops of the North, fell under the spell of art theory as it had evolved in Italy. It is in his development as a theorist of art that we can study in vitro, as it were, the transition from a convenient code of instructions to a systematic and formulated body of knowledge. And it is in his contributions to this body of knowledge, written and printed, that we can witness the birth of German scientific prose.<sup>17</sup>

We learn Dürer's idea about the use of the arts from the fragments of his treatise on painting. "The art of painting is employed in the service of the Church, and by it the sufferings of Christ and many other profitable examples are set forth. It preserveth also the likeness of men after their death."<sup>18</sup>

Dürer was not an exceptionally wealthy man, but he was

16. Ibid. pp. 241-244.

17. Op. cit., p. 244.

18. Lionel Cust, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 31.

19. Preserved Smith, The Age of the Reformation, p. 478.

quite well to do at the end of his life. Supporting his wife, mother, and young brother as a young man was hard for him. No doubt in doing this he developed thrifty habits. His practice of frugality and saving probably is what accounts for his moderate wealth in later life. Preserved Smith has the following to say about Dürer's finances:

Dürer sold one picture for \$375 and another for \$200, not counting the "tip" which his wife asked and received on each occasion from the patron. Probably his woodcuts brought him more from the printers than any single painting, and when he died he left the then respectable sum of \$32,000. He had been offered a pension of \$300 per annum and a house at Antwerp by that city if he would settle there, but he preferred to return to Nuremberg, where he was pensioned \$600 a year by the emperor.<sup>19</sup>

It is very difficult to determine the exact value of money of that time, but undoubtedly it was proportionately worth more then than now. So probably for us today these figures are very conservative.

All authors are quite well agreed on what was Dürer's personal character.

He lived and lives in everybody's memory as a man at once great, good and human. Of rather delicate health, handsome and more than a little vain of his good looks, he was the most loyal of citizens, the most faithful of Christians, the most conscientious of craftsmen and the best of friends. His simple habits and meticulous accuracy in money matters did not interfere with his natural generosity, with his love for good

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19. Preserved Smith, The Age of the Reformation, p. 472.

company and with his innocent passion for collecting. For, in queer little animals, in rare plants and stones, in tortoise-shells and quaintly shaped nuts, in fans and spears manufactured by American natives he admired Him Who had created "wondrous things" and had endowed the people in far-off lands with "subtle ingenia."<sup>20</sup>

This characterization summarizes well the person, Dürer, as the great artist.

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20. Erwin Panofsky, op. cit., p. 10.

The following quotation will help us to understand that there could have been such a man as Dürer who had a true evangelical faith before Luther.

It is an error to believe that Christianity did not exist before the Reformation, save under the Roman-catholic form, and that it was not till then that a section of the church assumed the form of Protestantism.

Among the doctors who flourished prior to the sixteenth century, a great number no doubt had a leaning towards the system which the Council of Trent put forth in 1562; but many also inclined towards the doctrines professed at Augsburg by the Protestants in 1530; and the majority perhaps oscillated between these two poles.

Anselm of Canterbury laid down as the very essence of Christianity the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement; and in a work in which he teaches us how to die, he says to the departing soul, "Look only to the merits of Christ, who has redeemed you, and proclaimed with a sword that you are free from all sin. Will my sin come from another," says he, "why should not my righteousness be granted me in the same manner?"

### III. Religious Development

It will be shown later in this chapter that Dürer had a clear conception of true Christianity several years before the formal beginning of the Reformation. We would certainly like to know whether there was some contemporary influence that gave Dürer his true Christian knowledge and faith. Also, we would like to know just what that influence was and the personalities connected with it. No reference to such an influence is made in any of Albrecht Dürer's writings. To my knowledge there are no other writings of his time which tell of any direct evangelical influence upon Dürer.

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Anselm of Canterbury laid down as the very essence of Christianity the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement; and in a work in which he teaches us how to die, he says to the departing soul, "Look only to the merits of Jesus Christ." St. Bernard proclaimed with a powerful voice the mysteries of redemption. "If my sin cometh from another," says he, "why should not my righteousness be granted me in the same manner? Assuredly it is better for me that it should be given me, than that it should be innate." Many schoolmen, and in later times the Chancellor Gerson, vigorously attacked the errors and abuses of the church.

But let us reflect above all on the thousands of souls, obscure and unknown to the world, who have nevertheless been partakers of the real life of Christ.

A monk named Arnoldi every day offered up this fervent ejaculation in his quiet cell: "O Lord Jesus Christ, I believe that thou alone art my redemption and my righteousness."

Christopher of Utenheim, a pious bishop of Basle, had his name inscribed on a picture painted on glass, which is still in that city, and surrounded it with this motto, which he desired to have continually before his eyes: "My hope is in the cross of Christ; I seek grace, and not works."

A poor Carthusian friar named Martin wrote a touching confession, in which he says, "O most merciful God, I know that I cannot be saved and satisfy thy righteousness otherwise than by the merits, by the most innocent passion, and by the death of thy dearly beloved Son. . . Holy Jesus, all my salvation is in thy hands. Thou canst not turn away from me the hands of thy love, for they have created me, formed me, and redeemed me. Thou hast written my name with an iron pen, in great mercy and in an indelible manner, on thy side, on thy hands, and on thy feet."<sup>1</sup>

Lionel Cust says the following concerning pre-Reformation activity in Germany and particularly in the city of

Nürnberg. Lionel Cust, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 32.

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1. J. H. D'Aubigné, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 98. 99.

The excesses and exactions of the Papacy soon began to excite murmurs of disapprobation, especially in Germany, where the printing press had now opened the gates of knowledge to the laity and afforded a channel for the expression of criticism and free thought. From the printing-presses at Nuremberg, Augsburg, and Basle there poured forth a stream of literature with which all the allied powers of autoocracy and priesthood were inadequate to cope. Theology no longer kept the key turned on the human intellect. The writings of the ancients in poetry and philosophy, the Literae Humaniores of the schools, brought men to consider man for man's sake, as well as for God's. Authors of their own country began to be read as well as the classics or the writings of the Church Fathers. No town was so well adapted to receive and foster the new ideas as Nuremberg, with its burgher government and commercial intercourse with other countries, and by its daily practice of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The great book-merchant of Nuremberg, Koberger, must be regarded as one of the pioneers of the Reformation. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that his godson Albrecht Dürer was on terms of friendship with the leading men of culture and learning in Nuremberg. Among these were Conrad Celtes, Maximilian's poet laureate; Peter Dannhäuser, author of the Archetypus Triumphantis Romae; Lazarus Spengler, the town secretary, poet, jurist, theologian, and friend of Luther and Melancthon; Melchior Pfinzing, provost of St. Sebald, court poet and polisher of Maximilian's verses; and, above all, Willibald Pirckheimer.<sup>2</sup>

This explains where Dürer probably acquired his anti-papal spirit, but it does not give us a lead on where Dürer might have acquired his true evangelical faith.

We are interested in knowing what influence Humanism had upon Dürer. The Humanist friends in the following quotation refer chiefly to Pirckheimer and Spengler.

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2. Lionel Cust, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 32.

3. Lionel Cust, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 33.

These Humanist friends of Dürer had a large share in the promotion of the Reformation. Reform, and not revolution, was in the air. The contest against the immoralities of the Borgian clique at Rome, against the traffic in indulgences, or against the attempted suppression of the freedom of the press, was in no way directed against the main dogmas or practices of the Catholic Church. To Dürer, among the rest, Mary was still the Mother of Christ and the Queen of Heaven. Saints and relics were as great an object of reverence as before. Only there was working in the minds of the German people the idea that a new age was soon about to open upon the world--an age of freedom, goodness, and humanity which they believed to be the long-awaited millennium, and to have been foreshadowed in the Bible by the Apocalypse of St. John.<sup>3</sup>

How did this affect Dürer?

The deep-souled genius of Dürer is, indeed, more distinctly manifest in his engravings than in any other of his works. Here it is that his intellect first shook itself free from the conventional bonds in which the Church of Rome had so long held the art of Germany. Here it is that he gave utterance to the questions, the doubts, the despairs that tormented his soul as they did so many other great souls in that surging sixteenth century, when the old foundations of belief were shaken, and the House that claimed to be built on a Rock was well-nigh swept away by the onward wave of progression.

Dürer only, of all the great artists of the sixteenth century, has expressed in art anything of the restless activity, the noble longings, the widening vision, and the reforming faith of the age in which he lived. The painters of Italy, when their religious belief failed them, and the source from which Fra Angelico and Fra Bartolommeo drew their inspiration was no longer attainable to them, fell back on a classic Paganism, which only sought to express the utmost grandeur of form, the utmost beauty of life, the deepest glory of colour, without occupying itself too much with the needs of man's higher intellectual

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3. Lionel Cust, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 33.



nature. Not so Dürer. It is to this higher intellectual nature that he constantly appeals. Those who seek merely sensuous pleasure in pictures need not turn to his; they are often, indeed, hard and unbeautiful, and the meaning, when we arrive at it, is almost invariably a sorrowful one--a lesson of pain, sin, conflict, and death.<sup>4</sup>

It is generally known that there was an important difference between the effect Humanism had upon the study of literature in Germany and that in Italy. In Germany the center of interest and study was on the original texts of the Bible. In Italy it was on the ancient and pagan classics. This gave Humanism in Germany at least somewhat of a spiritual character. Perhaps it was this spiritual interest of the Humanists that was a partial cause for Dürer to be so interested in spiritual matters. Perhaps this is the reason that he drew and painted not only the traditional Scriptural subjects of the painting of the Middle Ages and of the Italian Renaissance but also drew and painted almost any event recorded in the Bible. It seems that he drew and painted whatever Biblical scenes took his fancy for the moment.

Another author says that there is a possible connection of Dürer's picturing of Mary and of Christ to the old German legend of the false Christ.

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4. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 164.

Der Marienkultus der römischen Kirche war Dürer noch ans Herz gewachsen. Aber merkwürdig ist es, wie seine Darstellungen aus dem Leben der Gottesmutter protestantisch schlichte Formen angenommen haben, wie die Legende ihrer geheimnisvollen Schleier versetzt ist, wie die heilige Jungfrau zu einer Nürnberger Patrizierfrau geworden, deren Verwandte und Freunde mit ihr selbst Züge tragen, die jedem ohne weiteres verständlich waren. Die Grosse Passion wirkt dagegen wie ein volkstümliches Epos; wie schon vor Jahrhunderten die alten Dichter der Germanen, Otfried von Weissenburg und der Verfasser des sächsischen "Heliand", die orientalische Erzählung von Jesu Leben mit urdeutschen Stimmungselementen durchtränkt hatten, so geht auch Dürer vor.<sup>5</sup>

It seems doubtful to me that there was perhaps any other influence of the false Christ legend upon Dürer except the fact that he always presented the Biblical scenes in the common German environment. The characters were ordinary German people. Their clothes were the style of the time.

One really wonders just what the local church of Nürnberg was like. Maybe it itself was somewhat evangelical before the Lutheran Reformation. It is extremely interesting to note that Dürer's mother before she died in 1514 received the sacrament "in both kinds." Perhaps Dürer's own church or one of his priests gave Dürer his evangelical vision.

Dürer died in 1528; Pirkheimer in 1530. Yet Pirkheimer wrote the following quotation of what they were about 1500.

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5. Max Osborn, Geschichte der Kunst, p. 202.

'Originally,' writes Pirkheimer about thirty years later, 'I was a good Lutheran, and so was our friend Albrecht of blessed memory, for we hoped that the roguery of Rome and the knavery of monks and priests would be bettered; but instead of that, things have so gone from bad to worse, that the Evangelical knaves make these Popish knaves look pious by contrast.'<sup>6</sup>

This quotation does not speak of doctrine. It seems that Pirkheimer never understood the importance of doctrine. At first he joined Luther and supported him. Later he turned away again.

However, it is the opinion of reputable art historians that Dürer expressed and believed the Lutheran doctrine of the Atonement or rather the true Biblical doctrine of the Atonement before his contact with Luther and his teaching.

In der kleinen Passion schlägt er einen epischen Ton an: Arma virumque cano kündigt das Titelblatt, und der Zyklus selbst erzählt das Leben des Heilandes in behaglicher Breite. In der grossen Passion herrscht wilde Dramatik. Das Titelblatt zeigt den Schmerzensmann von einem Driegsknechte gehöhnt, und die Stationen seines Leidens rollen sich dann wie die Akte einer Tragödie ab. Der Luther-Stil erklingt. Alles ist männlich herb. Die romanisch-asiatische Gestaltenwelt des Christentums ist ins knorrig Germanische über geleitet. Der grosse Holzschnitt mit dem Haupt voll Blut und Wunden scheint ja keine eigenhändige Arbeit des Meisters zu sein, doch ohne Dürer wäre er kaum entstanden. Nur er vermochte ein so gewaltiges Symbol zu schaffen, in dem sich der Ausdruck unsagbaren Leidens doch mit dem Ausdruck so granitener Kraft vereint.<sup>7</sup>

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6. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 149.

7. Richard Muther, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 129.

Moriz Thausing says that Dürer must be counted among the reformers in his own right.

Wie ganz anders als Volgemut tritt Dürer in seiner Apokalypse an die kirchlichen Zeitfragen heran. Der kühle Spott, der ätzende hohn, der sich der Kirchenordnung entfremdet gegenüber stellt, hat nichts gemein mit der Gefühlswaise Dürers. Seine Natur ist von Grund aus religiös angelegt. Mit heiligem Ernste, mit gläubiger Ueberzeugung erfasst er seinen Gegenstand; und den höchsten Schwung jugendlicher Begeisterung athmet gerade seine Offenbarung Johannis. Allerdings steht auch er in den Reihen der kirchlichen Opposition, aber nicht auf jener heidnisch-humanistischen Seite, die bloss offen oder heimlich negiert, sondern in jener volkstümlichen Richtung, die den Kern, das eigentliche Wesen des Christenthumes emporheben will, indem sie die gleissende Form zerschlägt. Mit einem worte, Dürer gehört bereits jener jüngeren deutschen Geistergeneration an, die im reinen Glauben ihre Zuversicht sucht, er gehört nicht so sehr zu den Humanisten als vielmehr bereits zu den Reformatoren.<sup>8</sup>

Albrecht Dürer was almost a Lutheran before the Lutheran influence came to Nürnberg. He immediately was interested in Luther and supported his work.

Among the first to declare for the great Reformer were many of Dürer's friends, Pirkheimer, Spengler and others, and with the movement he himself had the warmest sympathy, though still a member of the Roman Church, and a participator in the benefits of her sacraments. In his journal there are several records of money paid to his own confessor, and to his wife's. Yet even in 1518 Luther had received presents of Dürer's work, which he warmly acknowledged, and in the same year Christoph Scheurl tells Staupitz of the congregation which enjoyed the preaching of Wenzel Link, mentioning by name Dürer himself and many whom we know as his

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<sup>8</sup>. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., p. 197.

intimate friends, "all longing for a greeting from Luther."<sup>9</sup>

Now we shall trace Dürer's early expression of reform ideas to substantiate this view point.

Albrecht Dürer created an altogether new conception of Christ in his art.

This Christ endures and suffers all; but it is His will to suffer; He suffers manfully. This is shown still more clearly in the wonderful head of the "Vernacle". Here we have a broad, strong, energetic, German head. More especially in the eyes and their surroundings, and in the character of the forehead, is Dürer's conception of Christ wonderfully revealed: Suffering, but firmly determined to remain Conqueror of Sorrow, and master of Himself; a sufferer, but a heroic sufferer, perhaps, even with a touch of heroic defiance in His features; full of sorrow, but still more of compassion, the misery of the whole human race being present to his mind. Thus Dürer created a new ideal of Christ for the world; To the traits of sorrow and resignation, he added those of manliness and strength.<sup>10</sup>

Dürer developed a new interpretation of the Mother of Jesus.

Alle groszen Geistesströmungen des hohen Mittelalters kamen zugleich ihrem Ausbau und ihrer Vertiefung zugute; die Scholastik mit ihrer festen und feinen Durchbildung der Dogmen, die Mystik mit ihrem Schwung und ihrer Gefühlstiefe, der Minnensang mit der Veredelung des Frauendienstes und schliesslich die bürgerliche Welt, deren wirklichkeitsnahe Kunst auch das Marienleben mit

9. Richard Ford Heath, op. cit., p. 77.

10. Friedrich Nüchter, op. cit., p. 61.

einen Fülle lebenswürdiger, alltagsfroher und traulicher Züge ausstattete, so Dürer, obwohl er für die Darstellung der Madonna auch grosse und feierliche Töne anschlägt.<sup>11</sup>

never pictured for her own sake. Always her expression and

Hier sei noch ein Wort über Dürers Auffassung der Madonna überhaupt bemerkt. So oft er auch die Mutter Gottes gebildet hat, immer erhält sie bei ihm vorwiegend durch die Beziehungen zum Kinde ihre Bedeutung. Meist ist sie irgendetwie mit demselben beschäftigt. Wenn Engel oder Heilige sie umstehen, so ist deren Aufmerksamkeit ausschliesslich dem Kinde gewidmet. Diese Unterordnung Mariens ist nicht minder in einer besonderen theologischen Richtung, als in der abstracteren deutschen Gemüthsart begründet.<sup>12</sup>

Madonna.

(Speaking of The Repose in Egypt) Es ist ein Bild des reinsten Familienglückes, das den armen Verbannten selbst die Heimath ersetzt. Dürer hat überhaupt mit seiner Schilderung des Marienlebens eine Saite des deutschen Gemüthes mächtig angeschlagen. Es ist die Verklärung des Familienlebens, über welches sich die ganze Fülle göttlichen Wohlgefallens ergiesst. Der Maler predigt damit zuerst die neue Moral, die später Martin Luther froh in sein Volk hinausrief: dass der ehstand "der furnehmste Stand auf Erden" sei, dass es "keine lieblichere, freundlichere noch holdseligere Gesellschaft gebe, denn eine gute Ehe."<sup>13</sup>

German couple living the life of the common German man and

This last quotation has greater force if we remember that the picture of which Moriz Thausing is chiefly speaking, The Repose in Egypt or sometimes called The Sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt was made in 1501 or 1502. Most of the Life of the Virgin series of woodcuts were completed

11. Willy Andreas, Deutschland vor der Reformation, p. 158.

12. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., p. 345.

13. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., p. 251.

before 1505. All the way through this series Mary was always the mother of Jesus in the full sense of the term. She is never pictured for her own sake. Always her expression and her position draw the eye to the Christ Child or to Christ as a Man, for instance, Christ Taking Leave of His Mother. The mother of Jesus has no place in her own right. To Dürer she has her place merely as the humble mother of Jesus, the Savior. How different from the Italian conception of the Madonna.

Also in this series, The Life of the Virgin, the happiness and contentment of a loving family is always expressed. Dürer shows how children of God ought to live with one another. The wedded life is held up to the German people as a most holy and wonderful thing. In this connection it is interesting to note that Dürer thought Mary and Joseph were married. They are always pictured together as a lovely and loving German couple living the life of the common German man and wife of the time of Dürer. One can only imagine how great an effect this picture had on the thinking of the German people at that time. They were being told by the Church that the best and holiest life was lived in celibacy.

The one work of Dürer before the Reformation which was most effective in undermining the Papacy was his Apocalypse which was completed and published in 1498.

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10. Mrs. Charles Beaton, pp. 212, p. 114.

(The author has been speaking of other reform elements) Meanwhile, hard by, young Dürer was working at his Apocalypse. A year before, in 1495, he had made a sketch of the Babylonian Woman, for the last but one of his series of woodcuts. The drawing is in the Albertina Collection. In the woodcut there is a voluptuous woman sitting on the beast with seven heads, holding the "cup of abomination" in her right hand. There is a group of people before her showing little concern in her presence. There is a king pointing at her as he talks, and a sleek country man with a slouched hat staring with horror; a soldier and a woman passing flippantly by. The centre figure, type of the boldest thoughts of the age, stands with his arm placed firmly on his hip, and gazes at the monster resolutely and inquiringly, in contrast with a monk close by, who alone prostrates himself before the woman. Above hovers the angel of the 18th chapter, and pointing to the city in flames upon the sea-shore, cries, "Babylon the great is fallen." And the other angel is casting the millstone into the sea, and crying, "thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down." To the left from the open heaven the "Word of God" rides forth on the white horse, followed by the armies of heaven, to establish the new kingdom. The picture is a revolutionary song-- "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."<sup>14</sup>

In another drawing of the Apocalypse, The Descent of the Four Horses, the clergy is condemned as well as the rest of the people. This Dürer drew 20 years before the Lutheran Reformation.<sup>15</sup> The St. Michael is also from the Apocalypse.

In the St. Michael both the figure of the saint and the demons floating in the air are reminiscent of Dürer's precursor Schongauer. Throughout is symbolised the triumph of Christ over the powers of the Emperor and the Pope, the latter being specially selected as the object of the Divine vengeance. Two editions of the Apocalypse were published by Dürer in 1498, one with

14. Richard Ford Heath, op. cit., p. 25.

15. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 114.



German and one with Latin text, printed under his own immediate supervision and perhaps with his own hands.<sup>16</sup>

Dürer condemned the Pope in 1498. Luther was not ready to do this until 1518.

Dürer's conception of true Christian theology was not completely clear in 1502. We know this from what he wrote at the death of his father.

"I pray you for God's sake, all ye my friends, when you read of the death of my pious father, to remember his soul with an 'Our Father' and an 'Ave Maria' and also for your own soul's sake, that we may so serve God as to attain a happy life and the blessing of a good end. For it is not possible for one who has lived well to depart ill from this world, for God is full of compassion. Through which may He grant us, after this pitiful life, the joy of everlasting salvation--in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, at the beginning and at the end, one Eternal Governour. Amen."<sup>17</sup>

During the years 1509-10 Albrecht Dürer had the urge to write poetry. He satisfied that urge to the amusement of his friends. Pirkheimer particularly made fun of his poetry. Pirkheimer who had a far better education than Dürer was always jealous of Dürer's greater ability in many things. However, Dürer's poetry is of great interest to us. It tells us what Dürer's religion was at that time. Albrecht Dürer headed his first rhymes with the following words.

16. Lionel Cust, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 34.

17. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 41.

"Jesus Maria, 1509.

"Thus says Albrecht Dürer the painter, who marks his engravings with the monogram A D.

"Every soul which attains everlasting life is quickened in Christ Jesus, who is both God and Man, two substances in one person, which can only be believed by Faith and never understood by the human Reason.

"The first Rhymes, which I made in the above year, were two, and each had the same number of syllables as the other. I thought I had succeeded well in them, as here follows:"<sup>18</sup>

"Du aller Engel Spiegel und Erlöser der Welt,  
Dein grosse Marter sey für mein sünd ein widergelt."

(Thou mirror of all Angels and Redeemer of mankind,  
A ransom for my sin let me in Thy martyrdom find.)<sup>19</sup>

The above two lines are the first rhymes that Dürer composed. Do not they tell us what was uppermost in Dürer's mind in 1509? By this time he positively knew the essential doctrine of Christianity. In comparison, we aren't sure that Luther knew the central doctrine of Christianity by 1509.

We wonder what could have happened to Dürer from 1502 to 1509 that helped him to have a clear conception of Christ's salvation. I think Moriz Thausing has an explanation.

Die Zeit, da Dürer Lernens halber Venedig aufgesucht hatte, war seit einem Jahrzehnt vorüber, als er, ausgeglichen mit sich selbst und mit den Bestrebungen Anderer, in bewusster Zuversicht dahin zurückkehrte. Dazwischen lag ein schweres Ringen nach Wahrheit, ein Kampf um die Gestaltung des Höchsten und Besten, wie

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18. Ibid., p. 280.

19. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 248.

ihn nur je eine Künstlerseele gekämpft hat. Und zwar fällt der Klarungsprocess, der Dürer plötzlich zur völligen Selbständigkeit, zur klaren Erkenntnis seiner künstlerischen Sendung erhebt, gerade in das Jahr 1503, ohne an irgend welche äussere Lebensverhältnisse anzuknüpfen. Allerdings mochte der Tod des Vaters am Ende des Vorjahres, der Dürer so sehr erschütterte, seine Einkehr in sich selbst mit veranlasst haben. Im Ganzen aber geschah wohl die Umwandlung und Vertiefung seines Wesens von innen heraus unter jenen Seelenstürmen, welche prophetische Naturen zuweilen durchzumachen haben, bevor sie zur Sammlung und Klärung aller ihrer Kräfte durchdringen; und wie dies wohl auch sonst vorkommt, war diese psychische Evolution bei Dürer von einer körperlichen Erkrankung begleitet.

Die Art, wie uns Dürer, dessen zarter Körper nachmals von vielen Leiden Heimgesucht war, von dieser seiner ersten Krankheit berichtet, giebt uns auch einen Schlüssel zu der Epoche seiner Blüthezeit. Im Britischen Museum befindet sich nämlich eine Kohlezeichnung: der Kopf des toten Heilandes mit der Dornenkrone, mit geöffnetem Munde und geschlossenen Augen, stark verkürzt von unten gesehen, und von entsetzlichem Schmerzensausdrucke. Wohlerhalten ist das Monogramm mit der Jahreszahl 1503, darunter sehr verwischt die Inschrift: "D.....angesicht hab ich...gemacht in meiner krankheit". Aus der eigenen Schmerzempfindung heraus sucht Dürer hier nach dem Ausdrucke des leidenden Christus; es ist ein entschiedener Schritt zur bewegten Seelenmalerei, zur Dramatik der Gesichtszüge; ein offenes Bekenntnis zu jenem Realismus, der das Höchste, das Göttliche doch nur in der ganzen, wahren Menschlichkeit begreift. Nach allen Richtungen holt nun Dürer weit aus. Von der geistigen Entwicklungskrankheit seines 32. Jahres erhebt er sich mit Riesenkräften, und es folgt das Jahrzehent einer Thätigkeit, deren Fülle und Mannigfaltigkeit stets mehr überrascht, je weiter man sie verfolgt und zu ergründen sucht.<sup>20</sup>

Knowing these facts I think we would say that Dürer probably became a true believer in Christ in 1503. In other words at this time he was converted. What caused his conversion?

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20. Moriz Thausing, *op. cit.*, p. 242. 243.

It seems he was brought face to face with death. He was reminded of Another Who was in the same position 1500 years before. He was led through his own suffering to understand that he was not right with God and that he needed a Savior. This Fellow Sufferer was that Savior.

In drawing the Man of Sorrows in this year Dürer used himself as a model. Dürer generally modelled the features of Christ after his own.

Before the end of 1510 Dürer also wrote the following poetry.

"O, allmächtiger Herr und Gott!  
 Die gross Marter, die g'litten not  
 Jesus, dein eingeborner Sun,  
 Damit er für uns g'nug had thun,  
 Die b'trachten wir mit Innigkeit;  
 O Herr, gib mir wahr' Reu und Leid  
 Ueber mein Sünd und besser mich,  
 Dess bitt' ich ganz mit Herzen dich;  
 Herr, du hast Ueberwindung thon.  
 D'rum mach' mich theilhaft des Siegs Kron."<sup>21</sup>

What could be a more beautiful expression of the Christian faith than this?

The title page of the Little Passion which was published in 1511 is additional evidence for Dürer's true conception of Christianity.

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<sup>21</sup>. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., p. 350.

The "Little Passion" has appeared in several different editions. The two first were published in the same year (1511) in Nürnberg, the first with the title,

"Figvrae  
Passiones Domini  
Nostris Jesu Christi,"

in moveable type above the vignette of the sitting Christ, and ending simply with the words, "Finit impressum, Noribergae 1511," so that strange to say, the name of the artist does not appear either at the beginning or end of the book.

The second edition may be known from the first by the title being arranged as follows:--

"Passio Christi ab Alberto Durer Nurenbergensi effigiata cu barij generis carminibus Fratris Benedicti Chelidonij Musophili."

Under the woodcut there are these Latin verses:--

"O mihi tantorum iusto mihi causa dolorum  
O crucis O mortis causa cruenta mihi  
O homo sat fuerit, tibi me semel ista tulisse  
O cessa culpis me cruciare nonis."

and under these--"Cum privilegio."<sup>22</sup>

Lionel Cust says the following about The Little Passion which was published in 1511.

This series, which is generally known as The Little Passion, is perhaps the best known and most popular portion of Dürer's work. It remains, and probably will long remain, unsurpassed as a pictorial narration of the great tragedy of the Christian Faith.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup>. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>23</sup>. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup>. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 53.

I think we agree with this statement. Dürer's picturing of Christ as the Savior of mankind in general is unsurpassed in the whole field of art. Few artists have taken an equal delight in telling the story of their personal Savior.

We are happy to find that Dürer not only professed his Christian faith, but he also lived it. Mrs. Charles Heaton mentions an example of his Christian love. The first phrase of the quotation refers to Dürer's and Raphael's exchange of pictures in which each admired the other's.

In contradistinction to this respect paid him by a great foreigner, we find that in the next year, 1515, one of his fellow-townsmen, a certain Jorg Vierling, of Kleinreuth, near Nürnberg, was put into prison by the Rath of Nürnberg for having uttered disgraceful libels against Dürer, and even having struck him and threatened him in consequence of some quarrel between them, the cause of which is not known. Vierling would not only have been imprisoned but punished in other ways, had not Dürer, with the kindness of heart to which all biographers bear witness, and of which this little incident is in itself a sufficient proof, interceded with the Rath for his enemy, and obtained his deliverance from prison; not, however, without his relation's giving security in person and estate (mit Leib und Gut) that he should keep the peace against Dürer and all concerned.<sup>24</sup>

So we have sufficient reason to say with certainty that Albrecht Dürer was a Christian before the Lutheran Reformation. We know that he was a Christian by 1509. Probably, he became a believer in his only Savior, Christ, in 1503. Also, we

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24. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 98. 99.

know that Dürer was a great witness of this faith. Through his many works which were widely spread the people of Germany had an opportunity to learn of Christ's salvation before Luther.

Dürer was much interested in Luther from the beginning of his Reformation. That was because Dürer already had religious convictions like those of Martin Luther. He welcomed Luther and his teaching. Through Luther Dürer gained a deeper knowledge and a greater understanding of Christian doctrine.

As Dürer advanced in life he became more and more absorbed in the progress of the Lutheran doctrines. He showed his hatred of sacerdotalism and lay oppression as far back as The Apocalypse, but he gradually began to take a deeper personal interest in the doings and writings of Luther, Melancthon, and Ulrich Zwinglius. -----To Dürer, as well as to Luther, one page of the sacred book itself was worth all the learning of the Fathers, one simple good action to another fellow-creature would be more efficient to secure future bliss than a thousand indulgences bought by gold and the repeating of venal supplications.<sup>25</sup>

The following is a part of Dürer's letter to Spalatin written probably early in 1520.

"Most worthy and dear Master, I have already sent you my thanks in the short letter, for then I had only read your brief note. It was not till afterwards, when the

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25. Lionel Cust, op. cit., Vol. I., p. 74.

bag in which the little book was wrapped was turned inside out, that I for the first time found the real letter in it, and learnt that it was my most gracious Lord himself who sent me Luther's little book. So I pray your worthiness to convey most emphatically my humble thanks to his Electoral Grace, and in all humility to beseech his Electoral Grace to take the praiseworthy Dr. Martin Luther under his protection for the sake of Christian truth. For that is of more importance to us than all the power and riches of this world; because all things pass away with time, Truth alone endures for ever.

"God helping me, if ever I meet Dr. Martin Luther, I intend to draw a careful portrait of him from the life and to engrave it on copper, for a lasting remembrance of a Christian man who helped me out of great distress. And I beg your worthiness to send me for my money anything new that Dr. Martin may write.

"As to Spengler's "Apology for Luther," about which you write, I must tell you that no more copies are in stock; but it is being reprinted at Augsburg, and I will send you some copies as soon as they are ready. But you must know that, though the book was printed here, it is condemned in the pulpit as heretical and meet to be burnt, and the man who published it anonymously is abused and defamed. It is reported that Dr. Eck wanted to burn it in public at Ingolstadt, as was done to Dr. Reuchlin's book."<sup>26</sup>

This shows with what great interest Dürer acquired and read Luther's works.

The following list of Luther's works is taken from a sheet among the Dürer Manuscripts in the British Museum. The titles were either in Dürer's possession or recommended to him by a friend.

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26. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 89.



1. Beschlisred van dem ablas was der sey.  
The pamphlet against Indulgences, Wittenberg, (1517?).
2. Ein bredig van dem ablas.  
Sermon vom Ablass und Gnade, Wittenberg, 1518.
3. Ein predig van pan.  
Eyn Sermon von dem Bann, Leipzig, 1520.
4. Beschlisred van gsetz gottes.  
One of the following is thus referred to, Eyn kurz form der zehen gepott, Wittenberg, 1518; Der zehen gebot gotes ain schöne nutzliche Erklörung, Augsburg, 1520.
5. Beschlisred van der pus.  
One of some half-dozen of Luther's tracts might be referred to under this title.
6. Ein predig van der pus.  
Eyn Sermon von dem Sacrament der puss, Wittenberg, 1519.
7. Ein predig von trelerley sünd vnd gerechtikeit.  
Sermo de triplici iustitia, Wittenberg, 1518. Of this sermon a contemporary German translation does not seem to have been published. Perhaps reference was intended to Ain schön Predig von zweyerley gerechtikeit aur dem Latein übersetzt von G. Spalatin, 1520, a translation of Luther's Sermo de duplici iustitia.
8. Ein ler der peicht.  
This may refer to either of the following, Ein kurtz underweysung wie man beichten soll, Leipzig, 1519; Ein heylsams büchlein von doctor M. Luther von Beich gemacht, durch G. Spalatinum geteutscht, Wittenberg, 1520.
9. Wy man sich zum sacrament schicken soll.
10. Wy man dy leiden Christi betrachten soll.  
Ain gute trostliche predig von der wirdigen Berayttung zu dem hochwürdigen Sacrament Doctor Martini Luther.  
Item wie das Leiden Christi betrachtet soll werden,
11. Van elichen stand.  
Ein Sermon von dem ehelichen standt, Leipzig, 1519.
12. Ein ferantwortung etlicher artickell.  
This would seem to refer to some earlier edition of Eyn Sendtbrieff un verantwortung etzlicher Artickel, Wittenberg, 1523; or possible the following may be meant, Eyn Sermon geprediget tzu Leipzig uffm Schloss am tag Petri unn Pauli im 18 Jahr durch Mart. Luther mit entschuldigung etzlicher artickel szo ym von etzlichen seiner abgunstigen zugemessen seyn in der tzeyt der Disputation tzu Leypssyk gehalten, Leipzig, 1519.
13. Awsslegung des vater vnser.  
Auslegung und Deutung des heyligen Vater unsers, Leipzig, 1518.
14. Awsslegung der 7 psalmen.  
Die sieben Busspsalmen teutsch übersetzt, Leipzig, 1518.

15. Ausslegung des 109 psalmen.  
Auslegung des 109 Psalms, D. Mart. Luther zu Hieron.  
Ebner, Augsburg, 1518.

16. Dy erst proposition dy martin mit echen dysudirt hat. The first proposition maintained by Luther against Eck at Leipzig in July, 1519, was, That, not the Pope but Christ, is the head of the Church.

It is clear then that, at this time, Dürer was a thoughtful student of Luther's writings. Melancthon, in the following passage, tells us that he was specially impressed by their "lucidity."

"Albrecht Dürer, painter of Nürnberg, a shrewd man, once said that there was this difference between the writings of Luther and those of other theologians. After reading three or four paragraphs of the first page of one of Luther's works he could grasp the problem to be worked out in the whole. This clearness and order of arrangement was, he observed, the glory of Luther's writings. He used, on the contrary, to say of other writers that, after reading a whole book through, he had to consider attentively what idea it was that the author intended to convey."<sup>27</sup>

As far as we know Dürer never saw Luther. Dürer wrote many statements expressing his sincere desire to see Luther and to become personally acquainted with him. Also he wished to make a portrait engraving on copper of Luther to preserve his likeness permanently. We do know that he saw Melancthon several times. Melancthon was also a friend of Pirkheimer as a fellow Humanist. Melancthon and Dürer met in Pirkheimer's home. In 1526 Dürer engraved Melancthon's portrait.

Dürer engraved the scholar's portrait, inscribing it with words of highest praise. Melancthon, for his

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27. William Martin Conway, op. cit., pp. 156. 157.

part, wrote several records of his intercourse with Dürer. An almost contemporary writer relates as follows, "Melanchthon was often, and for many hours together, in Pirkheimer's company, at the time when they were advising together about the churches and schools at Nürnberg; and Dürer, the painter, used also to be invited to dinner with them. Dürer was a man of great shrewdness, and Melanchthon used to say of him that, though he excelled in the art of painting, it was the least of his accomplishments. Disputes often arose between Pirkheimer and Dürer on these occasions about the matters recently discussed, and Pirkheimer used vehemently to oppose Dürer. Dürer was an excessively subtle disputant and refuted his adversary's arguments, just as if he had come fully prepared for the discussion. Thereupon Pirkheimer, who was rather a choleric man and liable to very severe attacks of the gout, fired up and burst forth again and again into such words as these, 'What you say cannot be painted,' 'Nay!' rejoined Dürer, 'but what you advance cannot be put into words or even figured to the mind.' I remember hearing Melanchthon often tell this story, and in relating it he confessed his astonishment at the ingenuity and power manifested by a painter in arguing with a man of Pirkheimer's renown."

As a further proof of the affect on which Dürer conceived for Melanchthon it may be stated that, after Dürer's death, his widow, doubtless in fulfilment of her husband's wishes, gave a considerable fraction of his property towards the endowment of Melanchthon's Theological College at Wittenberg.<sup>28</sup>

This quotation from a contemporary writer attests to Dürer's high mental acumen. It also shows that he was a man of high character, one who was ready to defend his own personal convictions. He used this characteristic in expressing his Christian faith in opposition to the dogma of the Roman Church.

Erwin Panofsky gives the following summary of Dürer's

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28. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 153.

association with Pirckheimer.

The relationship between this full-blooded humanist and Dürer was one of complete confidence and intimacy, bred out of affection, fostered by a close community of interests and spiced with good masculine chaff. Pirckheimer initiated his friend into the Greek and Roman classics and kept him informed of the developments in contemporary philosophy and archeology; he patiently assisted him in his literary labors and would suggest amusing or cryptic subjects for prints. Dürer in turn provided illustrations for Pirckheimer's writings, hunted around for him in shops and artist's studios, and illuminated the books in his library, not to mention such favors as portraits, bookplates and emblematic designs. Both criticized each other's weaknesses as frankly and good-naturedly as they themselves were teased by their mutual intimates.<sup>29</sup>

We are much interested in knowing Luther's influence upon Dürer's theology, his view of his personal relationship toward God. It has been shown that Dürer was a Christian before this influence of Luther. In fact, Dürer probably had a clearer conception of the meaning of Christ's atonement in making one right with God than Luther did in 1509. Nevertheless, Luther aided Dürer greatly in clarifying his relationship with God toward Christ. We are fortunate to have a quotation from Dürer's writings of 1520 which illustrates this greater understanding.

(Quoted as found in Conway) "Item als wyr durch dy vngheorsam der sünden in ewigen thot gefallen sind/ hat vns durch kein weg geholffen nügen werden / dan

29. op. cit., Vol. I, p. 7.

das der sun gotes mensch wurd / awff das er durch sein  
 vnschuldig leiden / dem vater all vnser schuld vber-  
 flüssig betzalett / damit das dy gerechtikeit gottes  
 erfult wurd / dan er hat aller awsser welten sünd  
 berewt gepüst vnd pey dem fater das ewig leben erlangt  
 / Dorum Jesus Christus ist der sun gottes dy höchst  
 kraft der alle ding vermag vnd er ist des ewyg legen.  
 In wen Christus kamt der ist lebendig vnd der selb  
 lebt in Christo. Dorum alle ding gute ding sind  
 Christi / nichtz gutz gerecht will machen der ist  
 vngerecht / wir können gutz wöllen Christus wöls dan  
 in vns / kein menschlich rew ist so gros das sy gnug  
 sein müg ein totsund zw das sy frucht bring."30

An English translation for the above follows.

"Seeing that through disobedience of sin we have  
 fallen into everlasting Death, no help could have  
 reached us save through the incarnation of the Son of  
 God, whereby He through His innocent suffering might  
 abundantly pay the Father all our guilt, so that  
 the Justice of God might be satisfied. For He has  
 repented of and made atonement for the sins of the whole  
 world, and has obtained of the Father Everlasting Life.  
 Therefore Christ Jesus is the Son of God, the highest  
 power, who can do all things, and He is the Eternal  
 Life. Into whosoever Christ comes he lives, and him-  
 self lives in Christ. Therefore all things are in  
 Christ good things. There is nothing good in us except  
 it becomes good in Christ. Whosoever therefore will  
 altogether justify himself is unjust. If we will what  
 is good, Christ wills it in us. No human repentance  
 is enough to equalize deadly sin and be fruitful."31

This is the faith that Dürer kept to his death in  
 1528. He died at the age of 57 years.

30. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 161.

31. Ibid., p. 155.

of Nürnberg dressed in the style of the times. The whore is in the usual artificial and decorative dress for such a character.

**SIV. Important Religious Works**

The discussion of the art works of Albrecht Dürer in this chapter is not intended to be a critical evaluation. We wish to trace true Biblical ideas and scenes in his works. The author will point out the elements of the pictures in which we are interested with our theological study of Dürer.

**The Prodigal Son (1496, copper-plate).** This parable had often been portrayed before Dürer. Many different scenes of the parable had been pictured before Dürer, but never before had any artist caught the central meaning of the story as Dürer did. He pictures the prodigal son kneeling down by the swine trough in the ordinary hog yard of Nürnberg of that time. The swine are crowded around the trough. The thing we are interested in is this: although the prodigal son is kneeling by the trough, Dürer has given him an upturned face. The eyes are looking toward heaven, and there is an expression of hope of forgiveness on the face. In this one picture Dürer showed the change in the life of the prodigal son.

**The Babylonian Whore (1496-97, woodcut from Apocalypse).** In this picture Dürer uses characters from the townspeople.

of Nürnberg dressed in the style of the times. The whore is in the usual artificial and decorative dress for such a character. She is sitting on the beast with the seven heads in keeping with Rev. 17. The Burgermeister, citizens of the town, a knight, and women talk about the woman and jeer at her. In contrast to this a monk representing the clergy of the Roman Church falls down on his knees and worships the whore. This is significant. Remember this was drawn, published, and spread widely before 1500. In this picture the Babylonian whore is symbolical of the Papacy. What a forceful attack against the authority of the Papacy. This becomes of greater importance if we remember that the Pope declared a Bull in 1495 placing a ban on the publication of all books of an anti-papal character.

The Descent of the Four Horses (1497-98, woodcut from the Apocalypse). The horses are crowding upon the people and crushing them. The emperor is entering into the jaws of hell. A woman is next in line. Then follows a monk. Dürer teaches that all men including the clergy are under the wrath of God.

The Holy Family in Nazareth or Repose in Egypt (1501-02, woodcut from the Life of the Virgin). The setting could be the yard of any German inn of the time of Dürer. The Child, Jesus, rests in the cradle. The mother, Mary, is sitting beside the cradle spinning yarn. The foster father,

Joseph, is chopping wood. Angels are adoring the Christ Child and helping Mary and Joseph with their work. Mary is a common German lady of the day. She is looking at the Child. Her figure and the expression on her face draws the eye to the Child. Mary has no place except as the humble mother of Jesus. The picture shows marital happiness and bliss. The observer has the feeling that there can be no better and holier life on earth than that of a man and wife rearing a family. These ideas are in direct opposition to the doctrines of the Roman Church.

The Bearing of the Cross (1504, woodcut from the Great Woodcut Passion). Christ and the procession are just leaving the walls of Jerusalem. Again, the scene and characters are German. Artistically, this picture is one of Dürer's greatest. Christ has fallen under the weight of the cross. One gets the impression that he just can't carry it another step. According to the legend, Veronica is there with the napkin ready to wipe Jesus' face. One feels that this is an unusual man suffering terribly for no fault of his own. Simon, the Cyrenian, is just beginning to take the weight of the cross from Jesus' back. In this picture Christ is certainly portrayed as the Savior of man.

The Presentation in the Temple (1505, woodcut from the Life of the Virgin). Simeon is holding the Christ Child and is ready to lay him on the table. Mary is kneeling



before the table. Joseph is standing by. There is a large crowd of people in the temple rejoicing and admiring the Child. A monk stands away from the center of the scene. He is leaning on a pillar of the temple. There really is no place for him. Mrs. Charles Heaton says that this expresses the futility of the monks and that this alludes to the overthrow of Rome.<sup>1</sup> This is a revolutionary picture for 1505.

The Christ on the Cross (1508, a copper-plate).

Christ has died. Mother Mary has collapsed for grief. The beloved disciple, John, is standing beside the cross almost overcome with the terrible agony. His hands are clenched. His arms are stretched towards the Figure on the cross. He is in deep sorrow. Another figure is most interesting. It is a woman standing on the other side of the cross. She is the only figure not stricken with grief. Rather, she has her chin resting on the hand of one arm supported by the other. She is in deepest thought. The figures are so placed that one sees the mother of Jesus overcome by grief first. The eye naturally follows to the other figures until it comes to this woman, the last figure the eye takes in before it looks upon Jesus, Himself. This is meaningful. This woman in her deep and sincere contemplation of the Figure on the cross shows the viewer how he is to react to this event.

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1. op. cit., p. 124.

Dürer through this figure wishes to tell us that this is no ordinary crucifixion. This death of Christ has a purpose for every man. Every person is to think for himself whether this Man and His death does not have some special meaning for him. The figure of Christ is in no way idealistic. It is a manly body with evidence of muscle. The face is broad and shows power and grief. It is the kind of a body one would expect for a man who walked for days, taught hours without stopping, and preached to thousands of people at one time. His face is one of power but now one of greatest pain. The body lies limp on the cross forsaken by God and man. This is preaching the Gospel of a Savior from sin through Christ.

The Descent Into Hell (1510, woodcut from the Great Woodcut Passion). Dürer uses this scene to tell the fact that Christ came into the world to save all men. The devil and his angels in various forms try to injure the victorious Savior. They cannot. Christ reaches down in the depths of hell and rescues the worst sinners. This may not be Biblical, but it told the people of Germany that there was none among them so bad that they could not be saved by Christ.

The Resurrection (1510, woodcut from the Great Woodcut Passion). Christ comes forth from the tomb holding the Christian flag. He is walking in a cloud in His full glory. It is a manly figure. It shows the nail and spear marks.

The expression on Christ's face is one of great joy. He is the messenger of joy and peace in this world. The soldiers are all around sleeping. Some of them are almost comical. Dürer never left a thing unsaid. One is gaping. Another with a long moustache appears most restful. The important thing is that Christ comes out of the grave as one having accomplished his purpose once for all time.

The Adoration of the Trinity (1511, painting, the Landauer Altarpiece, also called the All Saints Picture). Some art critics say that this is Dürer's greatest painting. It is a magnificent picture. Dürer spent a lot of time and money in making it. He took great pride in painting it. He wanted it to prove his reputation as a great painter.

The most lovely part of this picture is the adoring group of female saints to the right hand of the Vision of the Trinity; St. Agnes in particular, who bends down with her lamb in her arms and gazes up lovingly at her Saviour, is a charming figure; and the Virgin Mary, who leads the holy band, is full of sweet dignity. It is not perhaps without significance that she has not a more prominent position assigned to her in this picture. She merely comes with the rest of the saints to offer her homage to her Son, a circumstance which may be an indication of the tone that Nürnberg thought was already taking in the controversy that was to come.<sup>2</sup>

This is one of the most important facts of our interest in this picture. The mother of Jesus is at the head of the

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2. Mrs. Charles Heston, op. cit., p. 218.

women. She is the most honored of women and should have that place. But she is no greater or holier than the other women in heaven. We agree with this too. However, remember that Albrecht Dürer had this idea in 1511, six years before the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation. John the Baptist leads the men in heaven. We would place him there too if we were painting this picture. "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."<sup>3</sup> The pope and the emperor are placed in the fore part of the picture, but they are no nearer the throne of God than the rest of the people of the world. This is also according to pure Christian belief. God is pictured as the Trinity surrounded by angels. At the top of the picture is the Holy Ghost in the form of the dove. He is flying in the air above the head of the Father who is pictured as a very dignified elderly man with a flowing beard wearing a crown and a large rich-looking cloak. With His large cloak He holds the Son of God pictured as the Savior hanging on the cross. The Savior occupies the center of the picture. All lines point to Him. All faces of those on earth are turned toward Christ, the Savior. It is very significant that the people on earth cannot look at God the Father or God the Holy Ghost or see the Three Persons of the Trinity without having to see Christ first and without

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3. Matt. 11, 11.

having to look through Christ or past Him. To the people on earth according to the Bible Christ is their only connection to the One Holy God. It is also significant that Peter is in the background in the group of men. In fact, we can't be sure whether Dürer made any special figure among the men in heaven to be Peter. After John the Baptist follow David with the harp and Moses with the two tables of the Law. All this was painted in 1511. For this picture Dürer also executed the design for the framework. It is one example of Dürer's sculpture. The frame is very elaborate throughout. Above the picture are three carved figures. In the center is Christ pictured as the judge of the world. The figure on Christ's right is a saint going to heaven and the one on the left is one who is to be eternally damned. This is one of the very rare times that Dürer ever pictured Christ as the judge. As far as I know this is the only time. This fact has meaning for us. We remember the well-known statement Luther made about his boyhood. Whenever he went to church all he could see and think about was the stained glass window showing Christ as the terrible judge of the world. Dürer knew differently. Somehow God led him to know the truth about Christ's work for man. He did not get this knowledge from Luther. He knew this at least by 1509. He painted this picture in 1511. In summary, this picture contains several major doctrines of Christianity truthfully portrayed: the Trinity, Christ as

the Savior of man, the equality of all sinful men before God, the angels, and Christ's judgment on the last day. It condemns: Peter as prince of the disciples, mariolatry, the primacy of pope, sacerdotalism, sacramentalism, the necessity of a mediator for the Christian, and the exaltation of the saints over common believers in Christ.

The Knight, Death, and the Devil (1515, copper-plate). In speaking of this plate Friedrich Nüchter says, "Both Dürer and Luther indeed felt that the true Christian -- indeed, every brave, good man conscious of his loyalty to a high ideal -- is like an armoured knight, 'without fear or reproach', who fears not death or devil."<sup>4</sup> This is true, but Dürer did not get this idea from Luther. Luther might have picked up this idea from Dürer. This print was widely spread. It is one of the best known of Dürer's works today. This is one of the pictures in which Dürer takes his place as one of the greatest of all animal painters and artists. In February and March, 1945, the St. Louis Art Museum featured an exhibit called "Animals in Prints." Almost a third of the prints shown were by Dürer. This picture was one of them. The dog from this picture was enlarged and pictured separately. This is another interesting fact which shows Durer's greatness as an artist. However, the thing we are interested in is the fact in the above quotation.

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4. op. cit., p. 68.

The knight is riding on his steed very calmly and confidently. One side of him is death riding on a decrepit horse. Behind him walks the devil. The knight is unaffected by either. He rides forth undisturbed. This is the symbol of the Christian in this world who knows that, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."<sup>5</sup> Nothing can daunt the Christian who trusts in God through Christ.

The Four Apostles (1526, painting). Most critics say that this is Dürer's greatest work. It is in the form of two large panels. John and Peter are pictured in the one to the viewer's left, and Mark and Paul in the one to the right. Friedrich Nüchter gives a beautiful description of this work.

In the front, to the left, stands St. John with a beardless face and still youthful head, and a splendid forehead. He evidently has the features of Melanchthon, whose portrait was painted the same year. We can see nothing of his eyes, for his gaze is directed downwards to the Bible, out of which he eagerly reads. A large red mantle is caught under his arm, and then falls in a couple of long folds to the ground, so that only his sandalled feet are visible. One foot is put out a little to the side.

St. Peter, recognizable by the key, stands behind him with a round, furrowed, grey head. It is noticeable that the "apostolic prince" of the Catholic Church is placed in the background. He also reads the Bible zealously with St. John. Both therefore embody one thought: "Try, examine!" But then -- we proceed with a glance at the 2nd panel -- when ye have tried, and examined, and have found the truth, then be not like

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5. Romans 8, 28.

those of whom the inscription on the panel says: "They are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," but then: "Endure, defend!" Be like the two men on the 2nd panel.

For these two men, indeed, correspond exactly in point of arrangement to the two first, but offer a complete contrast as to character.

The one in front is St. Paul. How bold and firm he stands there, as if strife were near at hand! as if prepared to resist! Keenly he looks out at the foe; passionate courage, bold determination speak out of that face. What calmness and confidence, self-conscious, latent power are revealed to us in this powerful bald head, this decided nose, these flashing eyes, and strong neck! Like a warrior ready for the combat and already conscious of victory, he holds fast with one hand the hilt of the sword, which he plants down in front of him. In the other arm, he holds a mighty Bible, as a treasure that no man shall deprive him of. Then, nothing more -- save a mantle, still simpler and larger than that of St. John, which falls down in long lines, relieved by a couple of mighty folds. Behind, stands St. Mark, a fighter like St. Paul, but lacking his great calmness, as if trembling with passion.

His wide-open eyes flash under his firm brow. In his mouth, parted as it were by the quickened breath of passion, his teeth gleam brightly. Black curly hair surrounds the white face, animated by the lively play of muscle.<sup>6</sup>

Following is Dürer's own inscription which he appended below the panels. So that everyone might not be mistaken in the message he wished to tell, Dürer selected passages from the Apostles' own writings and applied them to the people with their problems of their own age.

"All worldly rulers in these dangerous times should give good heed that they receive not human misguidance

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6. Friedrich Nüchter, op. cit., p. 92.

7. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 134.



for the Word of God, for God will have nothing added to His Word nor taken away from it. Hear therefore these four excellent men, Peter, John, Paul, and Mark, their warning.

"Peter says in his 2nd epistle in the 2nd chapter: There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

"John in his 1st epistle in the 4th chapter writes thus: Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

"In the 2nd epistle to Timothy in the 3rd chapter S. Paul writes: This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

"S. Mark writes in his Gospel in the 12th chapter: He said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market-places, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts; which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation."<sup>2</sup>

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7. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 134.

This last great work of Dürer shows his connection with  
Lutheranism

Dürer never wavered for a moment in his loyalty to Luther. But--or, as he himself would have said, for this very reason--he, too, was a conservative. He went out of his way to ridicule the revolting peasants in his Treatise on Geometry of 1525, and he was staunchly opposed to the demagogic dialectics of the Nuremberg radicals. And so it occurred to him to use those mighty figures, which were to have flanked a picture now become meaningless, as messengers of what he believed to be the truth. He not only altered and amplified the iconography of his two panels in the manner already described, but also affixed to each a strip or tablet with a lengthy inscription. These inscriptions begin with a warning to the secular powers "not to accept human seduction for the word of God," and then proceed to quote pertinent passages from the writings of the four holy men portrayed. We hear them inveigh, in the powerful German of Luther's "Septemberbibel," against "false prophets," "damnable heresies," and the "spirit that is not of God" (II Peter, 2 and I John, 4); against the "sinners having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof" (II Timothy, 3); and against the "scribes who love to go in long clothing and love salutations in the market places" (Mark, 12, 38-40). To us, these passages sound anti-sectarian rather than anti-Catholic; but they were meant to castigate radicals and Papists alike. They endorsed the views of Luther while rejecting those of his illegitimate followers, and it is significant that the inscriptions were sawed off--to be restored to their original place only about a dozen years ago--when the pictures were transferred, in 1627 (sic: 1927 must be meant), from Protestant Nuremberg to Catholic Munich.<sup>8</sup>

In selecting them as companions for Sts. John and Paul, Dürer did homage to Sts. Mark and Peter also. But it is no accident that they remain in the background--especially with an artist who in a panel of the Heller altarpiece (The Adoration of the Trinity) and in a woodcut of the Small Passion had treated Sts. Peter

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8. Erwin Panofsky, op. cit., pp. 233. 234.

and Paul as perfect equals, and at a time when the "Primatus Petri" was one of the most important theological issues. There is, then, a subtle discrimination among the "Four Apostles." They are all holy men, and they convey the same message as to the problems of the time. But they are different in character and--from the point of view of a conservative Lutheran who was, at the same time, a natural philosopher--in human and religious merit. This can be confirmed by Dürer's own testimony.<sup>9</sup>

and that he expressed his Christian faith in his works. In The most important thing in this work for us is that the four apostles are put on the same plane. Dürer seems to go out of his way to put Peter in the background and to put Paul in the foreground. His inscription which was placed under the panels speaks for his Lutheran views and for his Christian theology.

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9. Ibid., p. 234.

... that God had his Christians as salt of the earth and lights of the world before Luther. Even the common people had an opportunity to learn of their Savior. There was a considerable amount of anti-papal and true Christian teaching in Germany before Luther.

If we accept Maria Thausing's statement, then it was possible for Dürer to have such an influence upon the common people of Germany.

Sehr richtig erkannte so das Papetthum als treibende Kraft, aus welcher der Widerspruch gegen seine Vorkherrschaft die Nahrung schöpfte, in deutschen Schrifttums, und namentlich in dem für innere Zwecke durch nach publicistischer Vermittlung, Gersond versuchte

### V. Dürer's Place in the Lutheran Reformation

So far it has been shown that Dürer was a Christian and that he expressed his Christian faith in his works. In this chapter we are interested in finding out whether it was possible for Dürer to have much influence upon the common people of Germany before 1517. If it can be shown that Dürer had such an influence upon the common man of Germany before the reform work of Luther, then Dürer was an important preparatory figure for the Lutheran Reformation. We will realize more fully that God had his Christians as salt of the earth and lights of the world before Luther. Even the common people had an opportunity to learn of their Savior. There was a considerable amount of anti-papal and true Christian teaching in Germany before Luther.

If we accept Moriz Thausing's statement, then it was possible for Dürer to have such an influence upon the common people of Germany.

Sehr richtig erkannte so das Papstthum die treibende Kraft, aus welcher der Widerspruch gegen seine Vorherrschaft die Nahrung schöpfte, im deutschen Schriftthum, und namentlich in dem ihm innewohnenden Drange nach publiciftischer Vermittelung, Umsonst versuchte

es aber diese Quellen und Ausflüsse einer tiefgehenden Reformbewegung zu verstopfen. Durch tausend Adern strömte das neue Leben, und seine Ideen haben früh schon auf einem Gebiete um sich gegriffen, das die aufgeklärten Päpste jener Tage wohl kaum beachtet, um wie viel weniger noch mit Misstrauen angesehen haben -- auf dem Gebiete der deutschen Kunst. Indess das Papstthum seinen Sitz mit dem reichsten Glanze der Renaissance schmückte und die Blüthe einer, am antiken Ideal genährten italienischen Kunst gehorsam seinen Befehlen diente, wagten es die unscheinbaren deutschen Holzschnitte und Kupferstiche, seine erhabene Weltstellung anzutasten und zu unterwühlen, indem sie Hunderttausende vernehmlich ansprachen -- überall, auch auf offener Strasse -- und darunter auch jene Armen am Geiste, denen Schrift und Buch noch verschlossen blieb.

An der Spitze derer nun, welche so zum offenen Angriff schritten, steht Michel Wolgemut. In Januar des Jahres 1496 warf er einen kleinen Kupferstich auf den Markt, der eine arge Lästerung des päpstlichen Stuhles darstellte. Er führt in vollkommenen Renaissancebuchstaben die Aufschrift: 'ROMA CAPVT MVNDI', Rom das Haupt der Welt. Man sieht darauf links im Grunde die Engelsburg, überragt von einer mit den Schlüsseln Petri gezierten Fahne, rechts die mittelalterliche Torre di Nons, von der heute noch die Via di Tordinona den Namen führt, und zwischen beiden hindurch fließt der Tiber. Mitten inne aber steht ein weibliches Ungeheuer, mehr beschuppt als behaart, auf einem Bockfuss und einer Geierklaue. Ihre linke Hand ist zum Zugreifen bereit, an Stelle der rechten erscheint eine Katzenpfote. Am Steiss sitzt eine hässliche Maske und ein Schweif, der in einen züngelnden Drachenkopf ausläuft, zwischen den Schultern aber ein Eselskopf, weshalb man das Blatt auch später kurzweg den "Papstesel" genannt hat. In sehr bezeichnender Weise erscheint neben diesem Ungethüm noch ein antikes Gefäss von der Form der Amphoren. Die Baulichkeiten sind ganz einfach in der Art der Schedel'schen Chronik behandelt.

Welche Fluth von derber, beizender Satire liegt nicht in diesem einen Blatte! Und da konnte es Wolgemut wagen, sein Monogramm, das Zeichen seiner Werkstatt darunter zu setzen; eine Kühnheit, wie sie im Jahre 1496 wohl nirgends möglich war, als unter dem aufgeklärten und milden Stadtregenten der Patrizier von Nürnberg.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., pp. 185. 186.

It is noteworthy for our study that there are only three of Dürer's original and independent woodcuts which are devoted to secular subjects. There are none after 1497. These three secular woodcuts are: The Knight on Horseback and the Lansquenet, The Bath House, and The Ergules. The last woodcut is on a Humanistic subject representing the combat between Hercules and Cacus.<sup>2</sup> The remainder of the hundreds of woodcuts are all on religious subjects.

The woodcuts were intended for the masses. These woodcuts were used as blocks for prints. With the printing press these woodcuts could be made quickly and cheaply. Since this fact is of greatest importance in our study of Dürer, several quotations will be given to prove this. These statements are all made by art critics who are not primarily interested in the religious aspect of Dürer's works. Therefore we can consider them objective and as near the truth as possible when there is little primary evidence.

Doch auch der Holzschnitt war auf die grosse Masse berechnet; seine Darstellung musste populär und all-gemein verständlich sein. Nur der Kupferstich nahm eine gewisse Mittelstellung ein. Er gestattete eine feinere Ausführung und, ohne gerade gemeine Marktware zu sein, doch eine gewisse, auch wohl geheime Verbreitung unter den gebildeten Kreisen der Nation.<sup>3</sup>

2. Erwin Panofsky, op. cit., p. 50.

3. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., p. 152.

The pupil had already surpassed the master, Wohlge-  
 mut. In 1496, or 1497, he adopted his later, world-  
 renowned monogram. He also painted Altar-pieces, the  
 execution of which, as then carried out in Germany, had  
 something mechanical about it. The master conceived the  
 design, and perhaps drew it on the prepared panel, the  
 pupils and the journeymen completed the work under his  
 guidance. But, even at that time, orders for large  
 panel pictures were not numerous. To support a family  
 from their proceeds alone was hardly possible, the  
 restoring and sale of cheaper works of art had to assist,  
 and so Dürer produced a great number of wood-cuts and  
 copper-plates. The wood-cut was then the only means  
 of producing cheap pictures, especially those so dear  
 to the humble believer, which illustrated the Bible or  
 lives of Saints, so Dürer also drew a number of pictures  
 on the block, with pen, paint-brush, or pencil. A  
 block-cutter carved them out. The pictures thus  
 produced were then sold, chiefly at markets and fairs;  
 indeed Dürer complains once that he had suffered much  
 loss "through servants, who had kept no accounts." It  
 seems, however, to have been no bad business for him,  
 especially as his fame grew, and his sketches were sold  
 and copied, even in Italy and France. Indeed, Dürer  
 seems to have felt at once, in the first years of his  
 work, that the production of such small detached pictures  
 of all possible saints, etc., could not satisfy him.  
 He wished to produce something greater in the style of  
 the wood-cut, a complete book, i. e., a series of  
 connected pictures.<sup>4</sup>

The following quotation is evidence from a primary source  
 to show that Dürer's prints were reasonable and could be pur-  
 chased by the common man of Germany at that time. It is  
 quoted from a letter written by Niklas Kratzer to Dürer.  
 Kratzer was an astronomer whom Dürer met in the Netherlands.  
 The letter was sent from London in October, 1524.

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4. Friedrich Nuchter, op. cit., p. 8.

5. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 48.  
 6. Ibid., p. 50.

"I want also to know how much a set of impressions of all your prints costs, and whether anything new has come out at Nürnberg relating to my art."<sup>5</sup>

We don't know whether Kratzer was rich or poor. Chances are the average astronomer of the time was not wealthy. But he was interested in purchasing all of Dürer's prints. If this is to be taken literally, Kratzer was asking the price of hundreds of prints. Almost every Dürer engraving of all types had been made by Dürer before 1524. I think we can take it for granted that Kratzer would have been able to pay for such an order. He and Dürer were good friends. One friend does not ask the price of another friend's product just to find out the price for the sake of curiosity. Even if we suppose that Kratzer was very wealthy and for that reason was able to buy all of Dürer's prints, we can still conclude that a common German of that day would at least be able to purchase a few of Dürer's prints without pinching his pocket-book. I think we can say that a person of average wealth of Dürer's time could purchase a series of Dürer's works, e. g., The Little Passion or The Life of the Virgin, as easily as we today purchase the average book on a cultural or religious subject.

Albrecht Dürer's wife, Agnes, sold his prints at fairs and church festivals.<sup>6</sup> If only the highly cultured people

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5. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 28.

6. Ibid., p. 39.



of Germany of that time were able to purchase and to appreciate Dürer's prints, practical Agnes would have made a mistake to try to sell them at the fairs and church festivals. She would find few highly-cultured people at those events. Our conclusion is that these prints of Dürer were purchased and appreciated by the common people.

Conway in speaking of Dürer's trip to Venice from 1505 to 1507 says, "Dürer did not arrive as an obscure sightseer but preceded by the fame which his engravings had already won for him all over Europe. His Apocalypse and other woodcuts had been sold in Venice, and local artists there had been swift to study and imitate them."<sup>7</sup> This is enough to show that his woodcuts were widely known. Also, this shows that there must have been profit in selling these woodcuts, or else others would not have been so ready to study, copy, and imitate them. This means that many purchased prints by Dürer. To have many purchasers, the common people of Germany had to buy the prints.

Because these prints were sold at a low rate to the common people, it was necessary for Dürer to invent the well-known monogram to preserve the identity of the pictures.

Gemälde, welche ein vielbeschäftigter Meister nur auf Bestellung malte, bedurften des Monogramms ebenso wenig als Holzschnittwerke in Büchern, welche die

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7. William Martin Conway, op. cit., pp. 45. 46.

Adresse des Druckers oder Verlegers trugen. Die Kupferstiche aber, welche man auf Märkten, Wallfahrten, Kirchenfesten u. d. gl. feil zu bieten pflegte, konnten der Monogrammes nicht so leicht entbehren. Die Platte wurde damit versehen, sobald Abdrücke für den Handel gemacht werden sollten. Einzelne Drucke ohne Monogramm gelten daher mit Recht als Probedrucke, und die grössere Seltenheit der unbezeichneten Blätter eines Meisters deutet schon darauf hin, dass dieselben nicht für den Markt bestimmt waren.<sup>8</sup>

The Dürer engravings were widely sold among the common people, if we accept Cust's statement.

The popularity and commercial success of Dürer's engravings are shown by the rapidity with which pirate copies were made and put upon the market. The chief purveyors of these copies were Israel van Meckenem, a goldsmith of Bocholt in Westphalia, where he kept a workshop, from which, until his death in 1505, issued numerous copies of the engravings of the Master E. S., Martin Schongauer, and eventually Dürer; and Wenzel von Olmütz, who devoted his attention chiefly to the works of Schongauer, the Master P. W. of Cologne, and Dürer.<sup>9</sup>

I have hitherto said nothing of the numerous copies that exist of Dürer's works, more especially of his wood-engravings, but it is well known that no artist ever suffered more from pirated editions than he did. Even in his lifetime he had, as we have seen, to print a warning to plagiarists at the end of his books, stating that his rights were protected by his patron the Emperor Maximilian, but this availed him very little, for no sooner were his engravings published than a host of fraudulent copyists fell upon them and reproduced them with falsified signatures in every possible form. As early as the year 1512 we find a decree of the Rath of Nürnberg forbidding a foreigner, who it appears was

8. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., pp. 52. 53.

9. Lionel Cust, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 28.

selling "Kunstbriefe," i. e., woodcuts or engravings, with a false Dürer signature, under the very Rathhaus itself, from doing so any longer under penalty of loss of his stock.

But by far the most formidable copyist of Dürer's engravings was the great Marc Antonio Raimondi, who, as is well known, besides other copies, reproduced on copper, in the most perfect manner possible, the whole of the series of the "Little Passion" and seventeen of the cuts of the "Life of the Virgin" almost immediately after they were published by Dürer.<sup>10</sup>

I think we have sufficient evidence to say that Dürer's prints were in the hands of the common people of his time. If even a foreigner found it profitable to sell falsified Dürer prints in Dürer's own home town, then we can conclude that many were selling Dürer's own prints all over Germany and in other countries of Europe. One of the purposes of this paper is to show Dürer's influence upon the German people before Luther. Even the falsified copies added greatly to this influence. In reality Dürer told the German people of his Christian faith also through the false imitations of his works.

What was Dürer's religious message to the common man? This has already been discussed in chapter IV. Here we will find what others say his message was.

William Martin Conway says that Dürer's Apocalypse was a sermon based on the vision of St. John.

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10. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 141.

11. Maria Thausing, op. cit., p. 248.

Dürer's Apocalypse is the first considerable work of art which strikes a blow for the Reformation. In it "Babylon the Great" is Rome. The pope and all constituted ecclesiastical authorities are the victims of the destroying angels. On page after page Dürer pours forth the vials of wrath upon the heads of the men of his own day. The book has nothing antiquarian about it; it makes no attempt to realize the Apocalypse as he of Patmos saw it. It is a sermon preached to the men of Nürnberg of the year 1498, the vision of S. John being merely the text.<sup>11</sup>

This statement summarizes what was demonstrated in chapter IV that Dürer's message was against the Papacy and all ecclesiastical authority. Dürer rightly believed that the Christian could approach God directly through Christ. His pictures expressed this idea.<sup>12</sup> Dürer also preached Christ.

Wie alles, was aus der vollen Tiefe einer Menschenseele erzeugt ist, hat auch die Ursprünglichkeit Dürers in seinen Darstellungen vom Leben Jesu ihre gewaltige Wirkung auf die Zeitgenossen nicht verfehlt, auch nicht auf die italienischen Meister.<sup>13</sup>

Naturally, Dürer's preaching of Christ was effective. It was the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit could be active in this preaching. This preaching did have a powerful effect upon the German people and as this quotation says also upon the Italian masters. They copied

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11. William Martin Conway, op. cit., p. 42.

12. Cf. discussion of The Adoration of the Trinity in chapter IV.

13. Moriz Thausing, op. cit., p. 245.

after Dürer.

We know that Dürer spread the message of his Christian faith through his many pictures. Preserved Smith says that the many travelers spread the tidings of reform among the people of the various countries of Europe. Among them was Albrecht Dürer. Smith gives him credit for spreading the feeling for reform in the Netherlands.<sup>14</sup> Since we know that Dürer was early a firm believer in Christ, he undoubtedly was a witness of Christ in him wherever he went from the Netherlands to Italy.

I think that Dürer's influence on the German people from 1498 to 1511 and later can be compared to the later influence of Hans Sachs.

On his return to Nuremberg, Hans settled, married, and became a father. When the Reformation broke out, he lent an attentive ear. He clung to the holy Scriptures, which were already dear to him as a poet, but in which he no longer sought merely for images and songs, but for the light of truth. To this truth ere long he consecrated his lyre, and from a humble workshop, near the gates of the imperial city of Nuremberg, issued tones that resounded throughout Germany, preparing men's minds for a new era, and everywhere endearing to the people the mighty revolution that was going forward. The spiritual songs of Hans Sachs and his Bible in verse were a powerful help to this great work. It would perhaps be hard to decide which did the most for it--the prince-electors of Saxony, administrators of the empire, or the Nuremberg shoemaker.<sup>15</sup>

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14. Preserved Smith, op. cit., p. 240.

15. J. H. D'Aubigné, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 147.

But I must not forget to allude to the celebrated Hans Sachs, the cobbler poet of Nürnberg, who is said to have done as much for the Reformation by his songs and satires as Luther and the other Reformers by their preaching. Such a man as this, although perhaps he exercised no direct influence on the growth of art in his native town, must yet have had a considerable indirect share in the formation of its peculiar character. A poet who composed and wrote with his own hand, as Hans Sachs tells us he did, "four thousand two hundred master-songs; two hundred and eight comedies, tragedies, and farces; one thousand and seven fables, tales, and miscellaneous poems, and seventy-three devotional and love-songs," can scarcely fail, considering that these songs and satires were in the mouths of all the people of Germany, to have materially affected the thoughts and opinions of his fellow-townsmen. Of these, none would be more likely to acknowledge the poet's influence than the artist-workmen who formed such a large portion of the population of Nürnberg, and who, as they sang his songs over their work, could scarcely have helped infusing into it some of the ideas they had gained from his teaching. For, as I have said before, the workman of Nürnberg was not obliged to copy set models with undeviating exactness, but was free to express his own mind in the stone or wood he was carving. The vigorous but coarse humour of the master-singer of Nürnberg is indeed distinctly traceable in some of the art-productions of his time, and I imagine that he is answerable for many of those rough pictorial libels against the Romish clergy, which, as well as in the printed form, occur so frequently in the sixteenth century.

Hans Sachs, indeed, contributed largely to foster the growth in Nürnberg of that radical spirit of progress which is regarded by many with such alarm, in its present manifestation, in our English manufacturing towns. Notwithstanding the restrictive and sometimes oppressive government of a paternal Rath, and the exclusive and protective policy of the various guilds and corporations of artisans, a free and independent spirit dwelt in those old burghers and workmen which caused them to be amongst the first to cast off the chains wherewith the Church of Rome sought to bind the inquiring intellect of her children, and led to Nürnberg being the first free imperial town of Germany that declared for Luther and the Reformation.<sup>16</sup>

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16. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit.

and right in way for an excellent a  
 man; ... as one than  
 Chris. ... and by a happy  
 death from these most troublous times, and perhaps from times  
 even more troublous which are to come, lost one, who was worthy  
 to look upon nothing but excellences, should be forced to be-  
 hold things most vile. May he rest in peace. Amen."  
 (op. cit., p. 136.)

Like Hans Sachs, Dürer with his many Christian prints could not help but have a great influence for the Reformation in Nürnberg and throughout Europe. But we must remember that there is one important difference between Dürer's contribution and that of Hans Sachs. Hans Sachs was born in 1494. For this reason even if he had reform ideas before 1517 it is very doubtful that such a young person could have had much influence for reform before the work of Luther. He was just too young before that time. However, Dürer had contributed much for the Reformation before it began formally in 1517.

In determining Dürer's place in the Reformation we are interested in what great contemporaries said of him. We have the statements of three after Dürer's death in 1528.

Luther: "You can count him happy that Christ so enlightened him and took him in good time from stormy scenes, destined to become still stormier, so that he who was worthy of seeing only the best should not be compelled to experience the worst. So may he rest in peace with his fathers. Amen."

Melanchthon: "It grieves me to see Germany deprived of such an artist and such a man."

Erasmus: "What is the use of lamenting Dürer's death, since we are all mortal? There is a memorial to him existing in my little book."<sup>17</sup>

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17. Richard Ford Heath, *op. cit.*, p. 89. William Martin Conway has the following translation of Luther, "As to Dürer it is natural and right to weep for so excellent a man; still you should rather think him blessed, as one whom Christ has taken in the fullness of his wisdom and by a happy death from these most troublous times, and perhaps from times even more troublous which are to come, lest one, who was worthy to look upon nothing but excellence, should be forced to behold things most vile. May he rest in peace. Amen." (*op. cit.*, p. 136.)

These statements show that Durer was held very dear by both Luther and Melancthon. The coolness of Erasmus' statement can perhaps be explained. It seems that Erasmus was hurt by Durer's realistic portrait of Erasmus. Formerly, he had praised Durer highly, but after the portrait had been made Erasmus remarked one time that he liked his likeness done by Holbein the Younger far better. It is interesting to note that Durer's portrait of Erasmus is considered by art critics as one of the most expressive portraits ever made of anyone by any artist.

We aren't the first to come to our conclusions. One authority who is also interested in the religious aspect of Durer agrees with us. Hans Preusz says that Durer was the last great Christian prophet before the Lutheran Reformation.

Jedermann weisz, dass diese Gesundung seit 1517 durch die Welt ging. Aber nun ist eins von groszer Bedeutung, -- meist wird er ubersehen: dieser neue Ton der Frönigkeit ist schon vor Luther da, wie eine Vorausahnung, wie ein Morgenstern. Und dieser letzte grosze Prophet vor der Reformation, das ist Albrecht Durer in seiner Kunst.

Hans Preusz says further in support of our conclusions.

18. Durer-Michelangelo-Rembrandt, p. 11.

19. Hans Preusz, op. cit., p. 14.



So schreitet der Herr Christus fünfmal durch die Passion, die Dürer, darin Joh. Seb. Bach gleichend, dem einzigen, der neben ihm genannt werden darf, immer wieder neu darstellte, gütig und stark, nicht weich, auch nicht gegen die Sünde, die er mit seinen blitzenden Augen trifft, aber freundlich und vergebend, Mut machend, mit einer Haupteslänge alles Volk überragend, männlich, heldisch, doch ohne jedes Pathos, vor dem Leiden ringend, in Leiden aufrecht, am Kreuz vollbringend, siegend in der Auferstehung. Und dies alles vor 1517. Sind Künstler nicht Propheten?<sup>19</sup>

An affirmative answer to Freusz's question is what we set out to prove in this thesis.

Our conclusions are these:

1. Dürer was a true believer in Christ probably by 1503, at least by 1509.
2. He attacked the Papacy and the Roman hierarchy before 1495 and published a book of prints (The Apocalypse) condemning the Papacy in 1498.
3. He preached "Christ crucified" from 1503 on.
4. He had a marvelously clear conception of Christian doctrine by 1510.
5. He told the German people his Christian faith particularly in the several passion series before 1510.
6. He proved his clear knowledge of Christian doctrine in The Adoration of the Trinity, painted in 1511, and through this also he provided an opportunity for at least some people of Germany to gain the same clear conception of Christian

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19. Hans Freusz, op. cit., p. 14.

20. Mrs. Charles Keaton, op. cit., p. 241.

doctrine. ~~Several portraits of the leading figures of the day.~~

7. He gave all people of Germany at least a possible opportunity to learn of their Savior in Christ through the publication and sale of many cheap woodcuts. ~~were all made~~

8. He definitely gained his knowledge of his Savior in Christ elsewhere than through Luther, since he probably knew the central doctrine of Christianity before Luther did.

9. He cannot be called the "painter of the Lutheran Reformation" in the sense that he received his religious awakening from Luther and then presented this knowledge and faith in pictures. At least 95 per cent of Dürer's religious works were made before 1517. The only important religious work of Dürer's in which Lutheranism had an influence was The Four Apostles, 1526. After Dürer joined Luther's cause in 1519, he spent almost all of his time doing other things besides producing religious pictures. He spent from July 12, 1520 to July, 1521 traveling in the Netherlands. There he acquired the sickness which later brought his early death in 1528 at the age of 57 years. This illness left Dürer weak until his death, although he continually worked as well as he could. After his return from the Netherlands, he devoted almost all of his time to writing 150 books on various subjects: civil architecture, music, fortification of towns, castles, villages, proportions of the horse, art of fencing, landscape painting, colors, and painting.<sup>20</sup>

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20. Mrs. Charles Heaton, op. cit., p. 241.

He made several portraits of the leading figures of the day. The only important religious work which he produced after joining Luther's cause was The Four Apostles. His well known pictures of Christ's suffering and death were all made before 1517. The people of Germany could learn of their Savior in Christ through Dürer's pictures of Christ, but even with the stretch of the imagination they couldn't learn of their Savior in Christ by looking at The Four Apostles, unless they had someone to deliberately tell them what message it was that the two apostles in the left panel were reading out of the Bible and the two apostles in the right panel were contemplating.

10. The work of Luther and others did help Dürer to a greater understanding of the Christian religion.

11. The work of Dürer before the Reformation of Luther is part of the reason why Luther's evangelical reform movement spread so rapidly. He arrived at an unfriendly place near Eisenach, rode off, saying that he dared stay no longer with him. Immediately 10 horsemen appeared, who treacherously carried off the pious man sold into their hands. He was a man enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and a follower of the true Christian faith. Whether he lives still, or whether his enemies have murdered him, I know not, but he has suffered much for Christ's truth, and because he has rebuked the unchristian Popery which strives against the freedom of Christ with its heavy burdens of human laws, and for this we

Appendix

Dürer was greatly shocked when he heard of Luther's capture in 1521. He was in the Netherlands at the time. On his travels he kept a careful journal in which he recorded every expenditure and every important thing that happened to him. His rather lengthy account of his reaction to the disturbing news of Luther's capture is presented here as found in The History of the Life of Albrecht Dürer by Mrs. Charles Heaton, pp. 305-306.

"Item: On the Friday before Whitsuntide, in the year 1521, the report reached me at Antwerp that Martin Luther had been treacherously taken prisoner, for the herald of the Emperor Charles, to whose care he was committed under the Imperial safe-conduct, on arriving at an unfriendly place near Eisenach, rode off, saying that he dared stay no longer with him. Immediately 10 horsemen appeared, who treacherously carried off the pious man sold into their hands. He was a man enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and a follower of the true Christian faith. Whether he lives still, or whether his enemies have murdered him, I know not, but he has suffered much for Christ's truth, and because he has rebuked the unchristian Papacy which strives against the freedom of Christ with its heavy burdens of human laws, and for this we

are robbed of the price of our blood and sweat, that it may be expended shamefully by idle, lascivious people, whilst thirsty and sick men perish of hunger; and, above all, this is most grievous to me, that God will perhaps suffer us to remain under their false blind teaching which the men, whom they call the Fathers, have invented and set down, whereby the precious Word is in many places falsely explained or not set forth at all.

thy Holy Spirit, we pray thee, O heavenly Father "O God of heaven, have mercy on us! O Lord Jesus Christ, pray for thy people, redeem us in thy right time, keep us in the true Christian faith, collect thy far-separated sheep by thy voice, heard in thy Holy Word! help us to recognise thy voice so that we may not follow any device (Schwigeln) of man's invention. And in order that we may not turn away from thee, Lord Jesus Christ, call together again the sheep of thy fold of whom part are still to be found in the Romish Church, with others amongst the Indians, Muscovites, Russians, and Greeks, who through the burdens and avarice of the Papacy have been separated from us. O God, redeem thy poor people who are constrained by means of great torments to follow men's ordinances, none of which they would willingly observe, and thus constantly sin against their consciences by embracing them! Never were any people so horribly burdened with ordinances as us poor people by the Romish See; who who, redeemed by thy blood, ought to be free Christians.

"O almighty, heavenly Father, pour into our hearts, through thy Son Jesus Christ, such light that we may recognise that messenger whom we ought to obey, so that we may put aside the burdens of the others with a safe conscience, and serve thee, the Eternal Father, with happy, joyful hearts; and in place of this man, who has written clearer than any other has done for 140 years, and to whom Thou hast given such a large amount of thy Holy Spirit, we pray Thee, O heavenly Father, that Thou wilt again give thy Holy Spirit to one who will again assemble thy Christian Church from all parts of the world, so that we may live again in a Christian manner, and that Turks, heathens, and Hindoos, and all unbelievers, seeing our good works, may be converted and accept the Christian faith. But, Lord, remember ere Thou judgest how thy Son Jesus Christ was made to suffer death of the priests and rose again from the dead, and afterwards ascended into heaven; and this fate has also in like manner overtaken thy follower Martin Luther, whom the Pope treacherously betrayed and took away his life, whom Thou wilt quicken. And as after my Lord was crucified Jerusalem was destroyed, so wilt Thou now, after this one has been taken, destroy the power of the Papal chair. O Lord, give unto us that New Jerusalem that shall come down from heaven, whereof the Apocalypse writes; the holy clear Gospel that is not darkened by human doctrine. This may every one see who reads Martin Luther's books, how they play these well, then, in the cause of the Gospel and the

his teaching sets forth clearly and transparently the holy Gospels; therefore his books are to be held in much honour, and not to be burnt. It would be better indeed to cast his adversaries into the fire, with all their opinions, who would make gods of men, and always oppose the truth. (Dürer seems to have greatly appreciated the clearness of Luther's writings, for Melancthon tells us that he used to say that 'there was this difference between Luther's writings and those of other theologians; that in reading three or four sentences of the first page of Luther's writings he could always tell what to look for in the entire work, whereas in other writers, after reading the whole book, he had to think and ask himself minutely what the author meant to express.')

O God, is Luther dead? Who will henceforth explain to us so clearly the holy Gospel? Alas! what might he not still have written for us during the next 10 or 20 years? Oh, all pious Christian men, bewail with me this God-inspired man, and pray to God to send us another enlightened teacher! O Erasmus of Rotterdam, where dost thou remain? Behold how the unjust tyranny of this world's might and the powers of darkness prevail! Hear, thou knight of Christ; ride forth in the name of the Lord, defend the truth, attain the martyr's crown; thou art already an old mannikin (Manniken), and I have heard thee say that thou givest thyself only two years longer in which thou wilt still be fit for work. Employ these well, then, in the cause of the Gospel and the

true Christian faith. Lift up thy voice, and so shall not  
 the gates of hell (the See of Rome), as Christ saith, prevail  
 against thee. And although, like thy master Christ, thou  
 hast to suffer shame on earth, and even die a short time  
 sooner than thou otherwise might, yet wilt thou pass the sooner  
 from death unto life, and be glorified through Christ. For  
 if thou drinkest of the cup of which He drank, so wilt thou  
 reign with Him, and judge justly those who have not acted  
 righteously. O Erasmus, hold to this, and put thy boast in  
 the Lord, as it stands written in David, for thou canst do  
 this, and, in truth, thou mayst prevail to fell this Goliath;  
 for God will uphold His holy Christian Church according to  
 His divine will. May He give us eternal bliss, who is God  
 the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one eternal God. Amen.

"Oh, all ye Christian men, pray to God for help, for  
 His judgment draws nigh, and His righteousness shall be made  
 plain. Then we shall see the blood of the innocent, which  
 popes, bishops, and monks have spilt, rise up in judgment  
 and condemn them. (Apocal.) And these are the souls of the  
 slain that lie under the altar of God and cry for vengeance,  
 to which the voice of God replies, Fill up the measure of the  
 innocent who are slain, then will I judge."

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