

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Bachelor of Divinity

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

6-1-1951

Martin Luther the Formative Years

Erwin A. Gerken

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_gerkene@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gerken, Erwin A., "Martin Luther the Formative Years" (1951). *Bachelor of Divinity*. 343.
<https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/343>

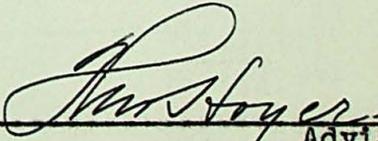
This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bachelor of Divinity by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

MARTIN LUTHER
THE FORMATIVE YEARS

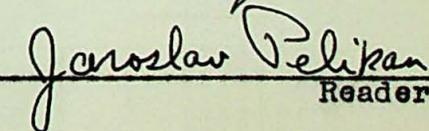
A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by
Erwin A. Gerken
June 1951

Approved by:



Advisor



Reader

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE NEED FOR REFORMATION.	1
II. THE EARLY YEARS	10
III. THE UNIVERSITY OF ERFURT.	26
IV. THE MONASTERY	32
V. THE TRIP TO ROME.	53
VI. THE AWAKENING AT WITTENBERG	60
VII. THE INDULGENCES	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	85

CHAPTER I

NEED FOR REFORMATION

"Blessed be the day of Martin Luther's birth! It should be a festival second only to that of the nativity of Jesus Christ," so says Robert Southey, the English poet.¹ Indeed, when one thinks of Martin Luther and the Reformation, one cannot but reflect a bit on the nativity of Jesus. Not that Martin Luther can compare to the Son of God, but that there was a time of preparation for both events. For the coming of the Savior there was a long period of preparation and the Nativity did not take place until all things were in proper readiness. Then as Scripture tells us, "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."² There was also such a time of preparation for the Reformation. Great events never happen suddenly. When the fullness of time for this Reformation had come, the leader had been chosen. We are justified in saying that God gave Luther the place he filled.

The period before the Renaissance has been called "The Middle Ages," or "The Dark Ages." Theologically and

¹Ewald M. Plass, *This is Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948), p. 1.

²Gal. 4:4,5.

doctrinally the church had departed from the Holy Scriptures. It had invented all manner of human doctrines. These departures are well known, such as purgatory, the Inquisition, transubstantiation, the adoration of the host, the supremacy of the pope, the buying of church offices, relics, indulgences, and many others. Morally the church was at a very low ebb, was depraved. There was not only greed, but immorality in its worst forms. Concerning this, the historian Giesler says:

The succession of popes which now follows proves the degeneracy of the cardinals (from among whom the pope is chosen) as to all discipline and sense of shame; they were distinguished for nothing but undisguised meanness and wickedness; they were reprobates.³

Even Catholic biographers admit this today. "In such a state, the professing church was neither the light of the world, nor the salt of the earth. Reformation, therefore, was necessary."⁴

There were reform movements before Luther. There was Savonarola in Italy, John Wycliffe in England, John Huss in Bohemia. In Germany there was John Reuchlin and Desiderus Erasmus. Both of these helped pave the way for Luther, though later they did not agree with him. Erasmus did invaluable aid; however, he was concerned mostly over a purely moral and

³W. H. T. Dau, Luther Examined and Reexamined (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917), p. 24.

⁴George Cubitt, The Life of Martin Luther (New York: Carlton and Lanahan), p. 18.

ethical reformation. But he did arouse interest in the study of the Scripture. He later turned against Luther because he was afraid Luther's work would split the church and cause trouble. He was a rationalist and lacked courage. But, "In Martin Luther the propitious moment and the qualities of leadership combined to produce the much-needed Reformation."⁵

Out of the dungeon in which John Huss was imprisoned before he was burned at the stake in the year 1415 he wrote the words: "They may kill a goose (the word Huss meaning in the Bohemian language, a goose) but a hundred years from now a swan will arise which they will not be able to kill."⁶

That man was Luther.

There were also other signs of preparation and events which clearly show the hand of God. Think of the inventions at this time. It was not an accident that there were five great inventions in this period. The improvement of the compass permitted more travel which helped bring about a political and commercial shift on the map of Europe. Then there was also the development of the Copernican theory. Though the views of Copernicus were not published till 1543, the church suffered loss of prestige, because it insisted on the Ptolomaic theory. Not only was the Gospel obscured,

⁵E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 11.

⁶John Louis Nuelsen, "Luther The Leader", Men of The Kingdom (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1906), p. 11.

but the church set their faces against reform. That elevated the Roman hierarchy to such power that even to criticize its abuses was to risk the charge of heresy. Then gunpowder made it possible to enforce safety on roads and ruin the little knights who were always in private wars. Above all the printing press and paper helped popularize knowledge and reduce the cost of books. It freed the student from the teacher and helped spread the Reformation and the Bible.

The invention of printing and hardly less, the invention of paper made from rags - for what could printing be worth, if we were still confined to so costly a material for books as parchment - prepared the way for the diffusion of the Scriptures.⁷

Then one can also see the hand of God in the political field, concerning Charles V, emperor of Germany, but also king of Spain. Charles V was so busy with wars, he could not take time to crush the Reformation.

Charles won the loyalty of the Spanish people during the twenties, but from the viewpoint of the German Reformation, he paid a high price for his victory in the Spanish uprisings. While Martin Luther was crystallising his views on doctrine and the reform of the Church after his condemnation by both Church and State, Charles V was busy with the problem of placating and winning the affections of his Spanish people. No doubt, his preoccupation in this respect contributed greatly to the progress of Lutheranism in Germany.⁸

⁷Charles P. Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1871), p. 8.

⁸Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 49.

And again,

The peace of Cambrai marked the end of a long and foolish struggle between two rival monarchs, which was all the more tragic from the Emperor's point of view since his preoccupation enabled Lutheranism to gain a foothold in central Europe which could not be dislodged. Charles finally went to Germany in 1530 to settle the Luther problem at Augsburg, but as will be seen later, his chance to crush Lutheranism was gone.⁹

Even at Augsburg, Charles V had to move cautiously because he saw that vigorous action was needed against the Turks, and to gain time, he signed the truce of Nuernberg in 1532.¹⁰ Thus, even in the political field, the Reformation came at such a time when the movement, because of wars, could not be crushed.

The Renaissance was the revolt against the subordination of the individual. Emancipation was the key-note of the Renaissance. There was a general demand for reform. We have discussed the moral depravity of the church and its refusal to reform. The inventions of this period also have been noted. A new religious and moral consciousness was awakened in Northern Europe. Nationalism was also growing. With nationalism and patriotism growing, there was a greater hatred of the papacy which always tried to interfere. The papal foreign policy and diplomacy made the pope appear in the sight of the German princes as no more than a foreign and often an

⁹Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 58.

unfriendly power. This does not mean that nationalism and the formation of national churches meant reform, but it did curb the power of the pope and made his efforts to crush the Reformation less effective.¹¹

There was hunger for a sure way of salvation. Churches and convents were being built. "Practically every village had its chapel, and every town of fair size had several churches."¹² There were more priests, an increase in saint worship and the worship of relics, a striving for merits and pilgrimages. As Dr. Theodore Hoyer says in his class lecture on the Reformation: "There was a general groping for salvation. People asked, 'Where can I find forgiveness of sins?'"

Then came the dawn of a new day. Martin Luther was born. The Reformation deeply affected every phase of life. Even the Catholics had to bring about a counter-reformation, though they corrected only the moral life, not the false doctrines they promulgated.

His career marks the beginning of the present epoch, for it is safe to say that every man in western Europe and in America is leading a different life today from what he would have led, and is another person altogether from what he would have been, had Martin Luther not lived.¹³

¹¹Lars P. Qualben, A History of The Christian Church (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1940), p. 209.

¹²Ibid., p. 212.

¹³Preserved Smith, The Life and Letters of Martin Luther (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1911), p. vii.

Naturally, such a man will occupy the thoughts of both friend and foe. Almost two thousand biographies have been written about Luther and the Reformation. No man has been more maligned and falsified and on the other hand, more praised and honored and acclaimed. The true measure of this man can be seen by the length of his shadow as he recedes in the past. He is even greater now than when he fell asleep. Tribute after tribute has been paid to Luther. Books could be filled therewith. H. Boehmer does not hesitate to say: "Even regarded purely as an intellectual character, he was a phenomenon that has no equal."¹⁴ The man who was closest to Luther, Melanchthon, said: "Luther is too great, too wonderful, for me to depict in words."¹⁵ Again he said:

One is an interpreter; one, a logician; another an orator, affluent and beautiful in speech; but Luther is all in all - whatever he writes, whatever he utters, pierces to the soul, fixes itself like arrows in the heart - he is a miracle among men.¹⁶

And McGiffert says of the Reformer:

He was very human, this hero of ours, fiery-tempered, passionate, imperious, lovable withal, warm-hearted, and generous to a fault. Quickness of perception, his quaint humor, and his homeliness of speech.¹⁷

¹⁴Plass, op. cit., p. 297.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 298.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Arthur C. McGiffert, Martin Luther, The Man and His Word (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1941), pp. 3-4.

For more tributes and character studies of Luther, consult the following footnote.¹⁸

Such was the occasion and cause of the Reformation, and such was the Reformer. But let us not forget the hand of God in this great work, and also that primarily, the Word of God kindled the fire of the Reformation. As Krauth so aptly put it:

On the part of its enemies the solution of its rapid rise . . . has been found by some in the rancor of monkish malice . . . about the farming of the indulgences . . . a solution as sapient and as completely in harmony with the facts as would be the statement that the American Revolution was gotten up by one George Washington, who, angry that the British Government refused to make him a collector of the tax on tea, stirred up a happy people to rebellion against a mild and just rule. . . . The solution for others has been found in the lust of the human heart for change . . . Another class attribute the movement mainly to the personal genius and fascinating audacity of the great leader in the movement . . . But the Word of God lay smouldering under the ashes of centuries; it broke forth into flame.¹⁹

As one thinks of this great Reformer, this man of God, theologian, Bible translator, catechist, hymnist, bold champion of the freedom of the conscience, founder of the Lutheran Church, leader of the Reformation which carried Christendom back to the Bible - one hesitates to attempt to write a thesis on his formative years. Yet it is so arresting and inspiring, that in joy, yet with all humility, I shall attempt in the

¹⁸Four Hundred Years, by various Lutheran writers, edited by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1916) pp. 71-74; pp. 290-306 and Krauth, op. cit., pp. 45-88

¹⁹Krauth, Ibid., pp. 4-7.

following pages to describe this man and trace his development in thought and life which led to the posting of the Ninety-five Theses on October 31, 1517.

When one tries to trace the early development of Luther, one finds that there is very little material on the first ten years after 1517. The formative years, years of growth and development, needed to have been taken into account. We have only a few scraps of the early years by contemporary of his time and Luther's "Vindications". The "Vindications" were table talks taken by students either at the table or they made notes later of what they remembered. Consequently, one must be careful with the use of the "Vindications". However, good research has been done that a good picture can now be gathered of Luther from indirect references found in Luther's voluminous writings and other contemporary source materials. Most of this research has been done by Hall, Hoberg, Schell and Klotzsch.

The parents of Martin were cross-cousin Luther and Margaretha von Hagler. The spelling of Luther was variant - Luther, Luder, Luder, Luder, Luder. Hans and Margaretha were from Holsdra, a small, dry village on the west slope of the Thuringian Forest, eight miles south of Eisenach. This village was from the very center of Germany. Holsdra was an insignificant village, about fifty families, and did not have any special interest. Luther's ancestors were free folk, not

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY YEARS

When one tries to trace the early development of Luther, one finds that there is not as much source material as for the years after 1517. The formative years, years so important for a proper understanding, seemed to have been taken for granted. We have only a few sketches of the early years by contemporaries of his time and Luther's "Tischreden". The "Tischreden" were table talks taken by students either at the table or they made notes later of what they remembered. Consequently, one must be careful with the use of the "Tischreden". However, much research has been done that a good picture can now be gathered of Luther from indirect references found in Luther's voluminous writings and other contemporary source materials. Most of this research has been done by Holl, Boehmer, Scheel and Rietschel.

The parents of Martin were Gross-Hans Luther and Margarethe nee Ziegler. The spelling of Luther was variant - Lothar, Ludher, Luder, Leuder, Lutter. Hans and Margarethe came from Moehre, a small, dry village on the west slope of the Thuringian Forest, eight miles south of Eisenach. Thus Luther comes from the very center of Germany. Moehre was an insignificant village, about fifty families, and did not have their own priest. Luther's ancestors were free folks, not

renters, but owned their own land. From this peasantry sprang Luther. He said once to Melanchthon in conversation: "I am a peasant's son. My father, grandfather - all my ancestors were thorough peasants."¹

The Luthers now moved to Eisleben. What brought the Luthers here? Here we run into some interesting comments. The Catholic Encyclopedia says that Hans Luther killed a man in uncontrollable rage.² Kostlin tells us:

. . . that the father of our great Reformer had sought to escape the consequences of a crime committed by him at Moehre . . . In Luther's lifetime his Catholic opponent Witzel happened to call out to Jonas, a friend of Luther's, in the heat of a quarrel, 'I might call the father of your Luther, a murderer.' Twenty years later the anonymous author of a polemical work actually calls Martin the 'son of the Moehre assassin.' With these exceptions, not a trace of any story of this kind, in the writings of either friend or foe can be found . . . The idea of a criminal flying from Moehre to Mansfeld, which was only a few miles off, and was equally subject to the Elector of Saxony, is absurd, and in this case is strangely inconsistent with the honorable position soon attained by Hans Luther at Mansfeld.³

If Hans would have been a murderer, would not his enemies have used this against Luther? But the real reason for his moving to Eisleben is understandable. At Moehre the law of primogeniture, which vests the possession of the land

¹Julius Kostlin, Life of Luther (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), p. 2.

²The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), IX, pp. 438-9.

³Kostlin, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

to the eldest son, was not recognized. It was here the custom for the youngest to inherit the property. Hans felt that his future was not too promising in Moehre, so he and Margarethe moved to Eisleben, where the mining industry offered excellent opportunities. Here at Eisleben, Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483. The year of his birth has not been determined with complete certainty. His mother did not remember the year, though she did remember the day, November tenth, and the hour, between eleven and twelve at night. However, it seems as though the year, 1483, has the appearance of more accuracy. Speaking of Luther's birth, Carlyle says:

In the whole world, that day, there was not a more entirely unimportant-looking pair of people, than this miner and his wife. And yet what were all Emperors, Popes and Potentates, in comparison? There was born here a Mighty Man, whose light was to flame as the beacon over long centuries and epochs of the world; the whole world was waiting for this man.⁴

Early the next morning, as was the custom, the father carried the babe to St. Peter's Church, two blocks from the house where in a little room under the tower the child was baptized by Pastor Bartholomaeus Rennebecher.⁵ Since this day was St. Martin's day, Hans Luther's son was named Martin.

⁴Charles P. Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1871), p. 23.

⁵E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), pp 104.

When Martin was about six months old, the Luthers moved to Mansfeld, about six miles from Eisleben. The exact reason is not given, but it is possible that he did not prosper in Eisleben, the numbers were crowding there; and so we can well understand his moving to Mansfeld, which was more in the very heart of the mining region. Here Hans and his wife lived the rest of their days, while Martin lived here until fourteen years of age. Much has been said about the poverty of the Hans Luthers. Smith said that "the boy's life was one of grinding, squalid poverty."⁶ That they were poor and had to better themselves through toil and thrift seems evident, but Martin did not have to go through such terrible poverty as many say, nor was it a contributing factor to Luther's later decision to enter the monastery. Luther tells us that he remembers his mother carrying wood on her back, but that seems to have been the lot of the wives of other burghers of that day.

It did not take long for the energetic, hard-working Hans Luther to better himself. When Martin was eight, Hans was elected as "one of the four citizens to protect the rights of the fellow burghers in the city council."⁷ He became a respected citizen. He became a fairly well-to-do man.

Just how early Luther's father became a small capitalist leasing and operating mines and furnaces is not

⁶Preserved Smith, The Life and Letters of Martin Luther (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1911), p. 2.

⁷Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 107.

known, but an old record indicates that he renewed a five-year contract in 1507 and must have been operating since 1502. . . He also purchased a home, on which there was a hundred-gulden mortgage in 1507. . . When Martin became a priest, his father visited the monastery with a company of twenty horsemen and made a gift of twenty gulden to the Augustinians, a handsome sum in a day when one or two gulden was the price of an ox . . . When Martin later matriculated at the University of Erfurt, the records classified him as being from a family that "had".⁸

Much is made of Martin's singing from door to door, that he was a poverty-stricken lad. This does not fit in with the picture of his father being quite well-to-do. We shall see later that even the sons of well-to-do families sang on streets, that it was an honor.

Martin's parents were strict and enforced obedience with the rod. The children were taught that sin was sin. As Luther once related that his mother once flogged him on account of a nut until the blood began to flow, and again, that his father once spanked him so hard that he fled from him "and for some time was very bitter about this mistreatment".⁹ However, this severity is often over-emphasized. Luther's parents were not different from many other God-fearing parents of that day who demanded unquestioning obedience. Nor did Luther hold this against them.

They seriously thought that they were doing right; but they could not distinguish character, which however, is very necessary, in order to know when, or where, or how

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 109.

chastisement should be inflicted. It is necessary to punish, but the apple should be placed beside the rod.¹⁰

As a pious mother, Margarethe taught him the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and simple hymns. He was taught about St. George, the patron saint of the chief church of Mansfeld and about St. Anna, the patron saint of miners. There is no reason to believe that the Luther home was abnormal. Rather it was looked upon and highly regarded in the Mansfeld community. Of Luther's mother Melanchthon says:

She was endowed with many virtues, which befitted an honest woman, and was especially well-known for her orderly domestic discipline, her piety and diligence in prayer and religious duties; so that she was regarded as an example of virtue and fidelity to all other upright women.¹¹

After the death of his father, Martin Luther in touching language recorded many instances of kindness and love and he remembered many of the talks his father used to have with him. Though the punishments mentioned were not the main reason why Luther later entered the monastery, it did further in him a strictness of conscience, which, along with other experiences, made him deeply sensitive of every fault committed. The entire home life was a deeply religious one. There was a fear-motivated piety in Luther's home. It was the same all over. They

¹⁰Henry Mayhew, Boyhood of Martin Luther (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers), p. 50.

¹¹Dr. Macaulay, Luther Anecdotes (London: The Religious Tract Society), p. 17.

worried whether they were living a life that was pleasing to God.

In addition to Luther's training in the home and saint worship, his belief in witches is often mentioned. How much was Luther influenced by the superstitions of the age? The witch craze reached its climax about 1580-1620. It had an influence on Luther. Fife shows Luther as expecting witches and devils everywhere.¹² But it wasn't as bad as that. Here the "Tischreden" are chiefly quoted. But it is safe to say that he heard from his parents concerning the devil, witches, and of demoniac powers. In order to ward off these witches, one might use the countless means of grace -

. . . which the church had created and commended to the faithful for this purpose. Thus the horror which gripped the children . . . was changed to a comfortable sense of security and relieved wonder at the marvelous power of the holy Mother Church which is superior to all hostile powers.¹³

Luther also did believe in a personal devil who leads people astray and in this he was right according to Scripture. While admitting the existence of these superstitions, we must not imagine these comprised Luther's whole early life.

¹²Robert Fife, Young Luther, (New York: The McMillan Company, 1928), pp. 27-31.

¹³Heinrich Boshmer, Road to Reformation, Translated from the German by John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 15.

"He was, as Mathesius describes, a merry jovial young fellow."¹⁴

Hans Luther determined that Martin should have a better chance than he. The parents took a special interest in Martin and sent him early to school in Mansfeld, hoping that he would someday be a lawyer. Here also severity was common practice. Luther says that they used harshness for their inability to teach and advocates "placing the apple beside the rod." However, such severity was common practice. "Luther may have received fifteen paddlings one morning because he did not know his Latin forms; but so did Malanchthon receive daily beatings at Pforzheim some years later."¹⁵ Instead of being taught, the languages were literally pounded in. However, Luther was able to carry on at Magdeburg and Eisenach without difficulty. The fact that Nicolaus Oemler, an old family friend, carried him to school, indicates that he started very early. Schwiebert thinks he was about four and one half years old."¹⁶ Religion had a prominent place at Mansfeld. The school was opened with prayer and a song. That the students could assist and participate in the services, they were taught hymns, versicles, responses, Psalms, and given an explanation of the Epistle and Gospel readings. That is why Luther later was surprised to find that the Bible.

¹⁴Köstlin, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁵Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 111.

contained more than the pericope studies. He also learned reading, writing, singing and Latin. In Latin he learned to conjugate and decline from Donatus. Much emphasis was placed on singing. "By tradition the students had to take part in all church services."¹⁷ For a full description of the schooling at Mansfeld, consult the following footnote.¹⁸ An impression was created here which should be noted:

There was a stained glass window in the church, which in particular held the little Martin enthralled . . . The window contained a picture of the Christ seated on a rainbow. Christ was represented as an angry judge with terribly frowning face, flaming sword in hand, coming to judgment, Martin knew not when. Since the boy knew not when, he felt the judge might come at any time.¹⁹

Then when Luther was fourteen, 1497, his father sent him to Magdeburg, along with Johann Reinicke, a good friend of Martin's. Martin was probably sent to Magdeburg, either because his father felt that Martin should have advantage of the best school, since Hans now was in good financial condition, or because, as Mathesius claims, this school had a reputation "far above many others."²⁰ Magdeburg was a city of around 12,000, about forty miles north of Mansfeld. The city was filled with churches, a clergy town, with a

¹⁷Boehmer, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁸Schwiebert, op. cit., pp. 110-117.

¹⁹Barend Kuiper, Martin Luther, The Formative Years (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1943), pp. 17, 18.

²⁰Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 117.

Franciscan monastery. "That this 'miniature Rome' left its impression on the young Luther can hardly be doubted."²¹

Two more impressions took place at Magdeburg, which influenced Luther in his decision to enter the monastery.

Luther saw Prince William of Anhalt, become a Franciscan monk, barefoot, bearing a bag of bread, and tottering under the burden, so feeble he had grown through fastings and scourgings.²²

Luther says that "whosoever looked upon him was deeply moved and felt ashamed of his secular way of life."²³

The other impression was the picture of a great ship of the church sailing toward heaven:

With the Holy Ghost for pilot and priests and monks for crew, with the pope, cardinals and bishops on board. The laymen? They were in the water, some drowning, some swimming, some clinging to the cords of good works thrown to them by the clergy in the boat. . . Luther thought, how safe and blessed to be a clerick in the ship.²⁴

What school Luther attended at Magdeburg is not established. Luther says that he went to the school of the Null-brethern, the Brethren of Common Life. These Null-brethren emphasized Bible reading and the practice of a godly life for both the clergy and the laity. There wasn't a school of the Brethren of Common Life at Magdeburg, but three or four of

²¹Ibid., p. 118.

²²William Dallmann, Martin Luther, His Life and His Labor (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1917), p. 7.

²³Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 118.

²⁴Dallmann, op. cit., p. 7.

them were teaching at the Cathedral School. Perhaps it was here that Martin went to school.

It is at this point that Schwiebert makes a startling statement, namely, that Luther made his discovery of the Bible at Magdeburg and not at Erfurt. Catholics assert that Luther must have seen the Bible before this, but we must remember that Luther had been taught only the Catholic church postils. The Catholic Mass books had been used in study. That the Bible was chained meant not that it could not be examined, but it was chained to a desk, because the Bible was a precious and expensive book. Here we should also keep in mind that the Bible before the Reformation was to be interpreted only by the Church, in the light of the Fathers and the Scholastics.

But to return to Luther discovering the Bible at Magdeburg. Luther's Table Talks are the source for the stories of the Bible discovery. We have already seen how cautious one must be with the Table Talks. Several versions place the discovery at Erfurt. However, Veit Dietrich claims that as a boy he happened on the Bible. Schwiebert now stresses two points for his position.

Undergraduates at the University of Erfurt could not slip into the library between classes and read. The Erfurt library regulations required that an undergraduate had to be accompanied by an instructor to enter the library, and to use or to withdraw books required a special privilege and the deposit of a forfeit.²⁵

²⁵Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 121.

And again,

It would be interesting to know why the word "puer" or boy, was changed to "adolescens" or "baccalaureus" in the later Table Talks, implying that Luther was already a young man or bachelor. As Strohl points out, the original is much more reasonable, which places the experience in Magdeburg in the Domschule (Cathedral School), where the Brethren on the Common Life sought to acquaint their pupils with the Holy Scriptures.²⁶

We now go into a period of his life filled with embellishments, traditions and conflicting stories. This is so, because both Melancthon and Mathesius are very brief concerning this period of Luther's life. It is the period of Luther at Eisenach. After only a year at Magdeburg, Luther was sent to Eisenach. Whether it was, as some think, because he had relatives there, we do not know, for it appears that he at most lived with them only a short time. Eisenach was in Thuringia and is estimated to have had a population of 2,100.²⁷ It was a city that had churches and was called a "nest of preachers."²⁸ There was also at the foot of the hill, on which was the Wartburg, a Franciscan monastery. This monastery was founded by the Schalbes and Luther had intimate contacts with some of these monks who devoted their lives to religious interests. No doubt, this helped further that growing seed, though not conscious of it, that

²⁶Ibid., p. 121-122.

²⁷Ibid., p. 124.

²⁸Ibid.

the monastic life was the ideal Christian life.

The schooling at Eisenach was very high quality, which qualified him for entrance into the university. As for his progress at the Eisenach school, Melancthon says: "Here he rounded out his Latin studies; and since he had a penetrating mind and rich gifts of expression, he soon outstripped his companions in eloquence, languages and poetic verse."²⁹

It isn't in his school life at Eisenach where we have these embellishments and traditions, but in trying to ascertain what effect events outside the classroom had on his inner development, namely, his begging and his acquaintance with Frau Cotta. Because many scholars think that Hans Luther was fairly well-to-do by now, some doubt that Luther ever begged for food. But most scholars concede the fact that Luther begged for food both at Magdeburg and Eisenach. However, the question arises as to the reason for his begging. Was he that poor? Many scholars, such as Boehmer, Kuiper, Kostlin, though they admit that it was an honor to sing and that Luther did not consider it a misfortune, yet feel that Luther had to sing because he was a 'poverty student'. Luther himself wrote in a sermon on sending children to school in 1530:

It is true, as is sometimes said, that the Pope was once a student; therefore do not despise the boys who beg from door to door "a little bread for the love of God"; and when the groups of poor pupils sing

²⁹Ibid., p. 125.

before your house, remember that you hear, as the Psalm says, great princes and lords. I have myself been such a beggar pupil, and have eaten bread before houses, especially in the dear town of Eisenach, though afterwards my beloved father supported me at the University of Erfurt with all love and self-sacrifice, and by the sweat of his face helped me to the position I now occupy; but still I was for a time a poverty student, and according to this Psalm I have risen by the pen to a position which I would not exchange for that of the Turkish Sultan, taking his wealth and giving up my learning.³⁰

We also know that begging was an accepted practice and that even boys of well-to-do parents participated. Mathesius states of Luther in Magdeburg: "Like many a child of respected and wealthy parents, this boy also shouted in the streets." He later adds: ". . . there (in Eisenach) he for a while also sang for his bread from door to door."³¹ Neither Scheel nor Schwiebert accept the theory that Luther was so poor he was forced to beg for food in the streets, but rather, that he was well-to-do. As stated earlier in this thesis, Hans Luther renewed a five-year contract in 1507, purchased a home in 1507, and when Luther entered Erfurt in 1501, he was entered on the records as one who "had". Why then did Luther, in the sermon referred to, call himself a 'poverty student'? Schwiebert replies:

An examination of the purpose of the sermon indicates that Luther was seeking to persuade parents to send their children to school even though they might not

³⁰Ibid., p. 126.

³¹Ibid.

possess the necessary funds for the student's entire support. He points out that being a student, even a poverty student, is no disgrace and in support of this statement cites both the Pope and himself as former students. He further emphasizes he was a "beggar pupil", but that such a position is no disgrace and he would not now exchange places with the sultan.³²

It is certain that Luther begged. It is also certain that many well-to-do students also begged. But whether at this time Luther was, as he said a "poverty student" or to which degree he was at this time able to be supported by his father, may remain a question that cannot be answered because of insufficient data. However, whether poor or well-to-do, he never spoke of the singing with distaste but rather spoke highly of it.

Concerning the Frau Cotta story, it is known that Luther knew the Cottas. But how the relation began brings two different versions. The Cottas, Kunz and Ursula, were a very distinguished family in Eisenach, as were the Schalbes, to whom Ursula was related. Schwiebert believes that since it is rather well established that Luther tutored little Henry Schwalbe, that thus the relation began and that he lived with the Cottas and ate with the Schalbes.³³ On the other hand Köstlin and Boehmer and others believe that Frau Cotta took Luther in her home as he was begging, because she had noticed his singing at church. Boehmer states "that from all appear-

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 127.

ances he was well satisfied with his lot when one day a "matron" or distinguished lady, who had noticed his earnest singing and praying in church, offered him free board in her house."³⁴ So also Mathesius states that Frau Cotta took Luther into her home because she like "his singing and devout praying in the churches."³⁵ Though this has been much embellished, that she took in a poor, helpless student, yet it seems that through his singing he was first received into this gracious home. At any rate, here Luther enjoyed a home where he was at ease and where there was also a deep religious atmosphere. As mentioned, it was also here where he met some distinguished guests, including the Vicar of St. Marien, who was in charge of the Franciscan monastery.

³⁴Boehmer, op. cit., p. 18.

³⁵Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 127.

CHAPTER III

THE UNIVERSITY OF ERFURT

In 1501, when Luther was eighteen, he entered the University of Erfurt and was registered as "Martinus Ludher ex Mansfeldt." Erfurt was at the time Germany's most famous university. The population at the time is estimated at about 20,000 people. The town is located on the Gera River in Thuringia, not far from Eisenach. It has been called a "miniature Rome," having "2 endowed churches, 22 cloisters, 23 cloister churches, 36 chapels and 6 hospitals."¹ Undoubtedly this impressed him more than his study. It is significant that the father recognized in Martin an industrious, bright boy and wanted his education furthered. He wanted him to study the law, as this was the best way of advancement, both in the church and in the state. It has been noted that the father was able to pay his fee in advance. This enabled him to be free all the university years and made him happy. He wrote to a friend: "I am settled at college as happily as possible."²

¹E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 130.

²Barend Kuiper, Martin Luther, The Formative Years (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1943), p. 32.

That Luther was gifted we see in that he received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in the minimum of time required. He received his A. B. degree in 1502, ranking thirtieth in a class of fifty-seven. The M. A. degree he received also in the shortest possible time in February of 1505, and ranked second in a class of seventeen. The University of Erfurt taught the "via moderna", in which was stressed that reason should be used to its fullest extent in the matters of the world, but not in matters of faith. The leading proponents were William Occam, d'Ailly and Biel. The "via antiqua", with St. Thomas the leading proponent, attempted to use human reason in the search for truth.

The two professors who influenced Luther the most were Jodocus Trutveter and Bartholomew Arnolda of Usingen. Trutveter deplored the "hair-splitting" of Scholasticism. Also because of Trutveter, "Luther was opposed to medieval cosmology all his life."³ Usingen also influenced Luther, distinguishing between Aristotle and the Bible.

In matters of faith he accepted the Scriptures as an unerring guide to truth, while his conception of the Church Fathers and later tradition as evaluated in relation to the revealed Word doubtless influenced Luther in his later discovery of "Sola Scriptura", or the principle of relying on the Bible alone in determining doctrines.⁴

³Jaroslav Pelikan, From Luther to Kierkegaard (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 5.

⁴Schweibert, op. cit., p. 135.

From these men Luther received sort of a distaste for Aristotle, especially when he later recalled how much men knew of Aristotle and how little of the Bible. The criticism of Aristotle in theology by Usingen was probably the reason why Luther rejected Scholasticism in the Wittenberg curriculum. Luther's course of studies at Erfurt were logic, dialectics, grammar, rhetoric, arithmetic, natural sciences, ethics and metaphysics.

How much was Luther influenced by Humanism? Erfurt had such Humanistic tendencies. Köstlin states that

Erfurt could boast of having issued the first Greek book printed in Germany in Greek type, namely a grammar, printed in Luther's first year at the University. It was the Greek and Latin poets whose writings stirred the students.⁵

Because of Humanism Luther did read more widely the ancient classics and Humanism did also further Bible study. However, the real impetus to his inner development came not from Humanism, but rather from his study of the Bible. Humanism did cultivate a free, intellectual spirit to help distinguish between truth and error. However, it did not shake him in his subjection to the faith and authority of the church. That this is true, we see that he very soon adopted the monastic life. We do not find any evidence to indicate any intimacy of Luther with the circles of Humanists, nor did they take particular notice of him.

⁵Julius Köstlin, Life of Luther (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), p. 31.

An important question at this time concerns his life at Erfurt. Was he, as Denifle and Grisar claim, an immoral degenerate? Was this immoral life what led to his entering the monastery? It hardly seems necessary to say much on this subject. Any unbiased and truthful person will admit that his life was pure. Smith states that his life "was pure and godly may be inferred from the fact that his enemies never found any reproach in it and because of the absence of self-accusation."⁶ Furthermore, at the university there was a strict academic control. The students lived in "Bursen" or dormitories, supervised by a master of arts. The rector and the dean visited the dormitories quarterly and inquired into the character of the students. No student could take his final examination unless the master of arts would testify to the moral integrity of the student. "This practice was very important, since a degree from Erfurt implied not only an academic accomplishment, but moral integrity as well."⁷ The students had instructions as to the kind and number of prayers to be said every day. The university also made it almost impossible for students to come into contact with women.

Under the rules of the "Himmelspforte" students might mingle with women only by permission of the rector and then only at weddings or other special occasions. No

⁶Preserved Smith, The Life and Letters of Martin Luther (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1911), p.6.

⁷Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 132.

woman was ever permitted to enter the "Bursen" . . . Even to visit a business place off the campus required permission. Nor were students permitted out of the dormitories after closing hours except by special permission. This permission could be obtained only in exceptional cases, and it was necessary for the student to check out a lantern at the rector's office, which he returned later in the evening when re-admitted to the dormitory.

In such an atmosphere and with such supervision, it would have been impossible for Luther to deceive his fellow students and the faculty. We have seen furthermore, how Luther received his degrees in the minimum of time required and that later he was recommended as a teacher for the University of Wittenberg.

We might briefly discuss here once again where Luther first came upon the Bible. As noted in the previous chapter, Schwiebert and a few others place this discovery, not at Erfurt, but at Magdeburg. Little did Luther realize when he first saw the Bible that he would one day translate it into German and that, because of the Bible, he would bring about the Reformation and shake the very throne of the pope. When Luther found the Bible, either at Magdeburg or Erfurt, where it was chained because of its rarity and expense, he happened to open it to the story of Hannah consecrating her boy to the Lord. That portion was not in the church service. This created in him a desire for the Word. Of this finding Boehmer states:

⁸Ibid., p. 133.

He himself says only that when he was twenty years old he happened upon a complete Bible the first time in his life. It was in the university library, into which one of the professors took him. He opened the volume to the story of Hannah . . . He tells us further that hitherto he had known only the Sunday Gospels and was astonished to find such entirely unfamiliar stories in the Bible. It has been said that Luther could not possibly have reached his twentieth year without having seen a Bible. But inasmuch as he asserts this so positively, and inasmuch as the Bible did not figure either in the instruction of the lower schools or in the curriculum of the arts course,⁹ we have no reason for doubting his statements.

Krauth and others agree with Boehmer. The discovery of the Bible, that there was more to it than just the Gospel lessons, is so definite it cannot be denied. However, whether the discovery was at Magdeburg or at Erfurt is difficult to determine. Nor does it seem of utmost importance. The discovery of the Bible is most important, for gradually the Bible became for him the sole source of information, the inspired Word of God. By 1521 he could say at Worms, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."

After receiving his master's degree in February, 1505, as his father desired, Luther turned to the study of the law. This seemed to be the best paying profession for a young man. He had the expensive set of "Corpus Juris" when he on July 17, 1505, suddenly entered the Augustinian monastery.

⁹Heinrich Boehmer, Road to Reformation, Translated from the German by John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), pp.30-31.

CHAPTER IV

THE MONASTERY

Why did this gifted young law student enter the monastery? Why did Luther end such a promising career by selling his books, plan a farewell party, and then enter the monastery in the company of his companions, who were in tears? When he entered he thought it was for good. As he said in later life: "I never thought to leave again the convent. I was entirely dead to the world, until God thought that the time had come."¹ He entered though he knew it meant complete surrender of self, a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. He entered though his father was against it, wanting him to become a lawyer. Why?

It was not because he was disappointed in love. This has been shown to be almost impossible. Nor was it because he did not like law, for there were other professions he could have chosen. Before much research was done before 1883, many felt he entered the monastery because of parental misunderstanding, because of the abuse he received in school at Mansfeld, and because of the begging he had to do as a "poverty student" in Magdeburg and Eisenach. Smith says that

¹Julius Köstlin, Life of Luther (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), p. 39.

Luther made the following remark about the punishments at home: "It was this strict discipline which finally forced me into the monastery, although they meant heartily well by it."² But we have seen that this demand of strict obedience was characteristic of all households and schools at the time. Through it though, Luther's conscience was awakened and he learned a deep piety motivated by fear. That he was poor when begging on the streets at Magdeburg and Eisenach seems untrue. These points alone would not have driven him into the monastery.

After 1883 a different view was taken. Kolde, Köstlin and others asserted that Luther's boyhood days were no different from that of any other Catholic boy. His decision to enter the monastery was a sudden, unpremeditated act. As he was returning from a visit to his father's house on July 2, he was near Erfurt, at the village of Stotternheim when a terrific storm broke over his head. Trembling with fear from a flash of lightning, he fell to the ground and exclaimed: "Help, Anna, beloved Saint. I will be a monk." He then carried out his vow, sudden and spontaneous, and entered the monastery. *Crotus Rubeanus* is used for the contention when he wrote to Luther in 1519:

Proceed as you have begun, and leave an example to posterity; for what you do is not without the will of the Gods. Divine Providence intended this when

²Preserved Smith, The Life and Letters of Martin Luther (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1911), p. 2.

you, returning from your parents, were prostrated to the ground before the town of Erfurt by a bolt of lightning, like another Paul, and compelled to withdraw from our sorrowing company into the wall of the Augustinian monastery.³

Again, Luther wrote Melanchthon that he made his decision in a moment of terror and was forced rather than drawn gradually into the monastery.⁴ It is also pointed out that in the Middle Ages a flash of lightning was identified with the wrath of God.

More recent men, like Boehmer, Strohl, Holl and others, admit that Luther's boyhood days were not out of the ordinary, and that the Stotternheim experience was the deciding thing. But it doesn't seem possible that the decision was forced. Actually, there were many things that prepared Luther for that momentous decision. It wasn't all so simple as just a bolt of lightning. Previous to the Stotternheim experience, Luther had done much thinking on his relation to God. As Strohl correctly states: "The stroke of lightning merely made him aware of what was already in his soul."⁵ Even Luther mentions that he was troubled over his salvation. In a sermon in 1534 he states:

With reference to my previous experience, I was myself a monk for fifteen years and diligently all through these years read and did everything I could. Yet I

³E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 141.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 142.

was never able to console myself regarding my baptism, but always thought: "Oh, when will you once become pious enough and do enough to obtain a gracious God?" Such thoughts drove me into the monastery.⁶

Martin was a deeply religious person. He wanted to live a life pleasing to God. "What must I do to be saved?" was the question of paramount interest to him. He never knew whether he rendered satisfaction enough to have a merciful God. He once said that doubt makes a monk. What if he would die, would he be saved? Such were his thoughts when the Stotternheim experience occurred, and when he was scared, entering the monastery was the natural climax of his thoughts and numerous other experiences and impressions. Some of these other contributing factors have been mentioned. There was his training at home which sharpened his conscience. There was the impression received at Magdeburg of the Prince of Anhalt begging through the streets and Luther commented: "Whosoever looked upon him was deeply moved, and felt ashamed of his secular way of life." There was the scene picturing Christ as a terrible judge which made Luther terror-stricken. Then again Luther saw the picture of the ship going to heaven with the monks and priests on board and the laymen were struggling in the water, trying to grab a rope thrown to them from the ship. The teaching of the church, rather than teaching salvation only through faith

⁶Ibid.

in the loving Savior, was to turn them to the Virgin Mary, to saints, to lay hold of the Sacraments, to buy indulgences, and to do penance. As the Catholic Clayton admits: "Everything in the Catholic doctrine of forgiveness is conditional . . . It was presumption to be certain of dying in a state of grace and gaining heaven."⁷ In addition, every town where Luther was, was full of churches and monasteries, steeples and spires, cloisters and priests. Finally, we have seen his acquaintance at Eisenach with Vicar Johann Braun, who was invited by Luther to his ordination to priesthood.

In addition to all these impressions, there are two others we ought to mention. Traveling with a companion, not far from Erfurt, Luther accidentally ran his sword, which after the custom of the students hung at his side, into his leg, severing the cephalic vein. It bled profusely. While his companion hurried to get a physician, Luther tried to stop the flow of blood, pressing the wound, but the limb swelled frightfully. In mortal fear Luther cried out, "Mary, help me." Again the next night the wound opened and Luther called on Mary. Later in life Luther said that had he died, he would have died trusting in Mary. The other experience which brought him face to face with death was the sudden death

⁷William Dallmann, "A Catholic on Luther" (Excerpts from Joseph Clayton's Luther and His Work"), The American Lutheran, (November, 1945), XXVIII, p. 10.

of a friend. Melancthon and Mathesius both state that the sudden death of this friend filled Luther with great terror of the wrath of God and eternal judgment.⁸

So it only seems plausible that his entry into the monastery was the result of a conscience strengthened and deepened by many experiences and impressions. The climax was reached at Stotternheim. The church had held before the eyes of the people that monasticism was the highest Christian ideal. Luther thought that of all places, here he could live a satisfactory life and win the favor of God. Both Smith and Boehmer summarize it well. Smith states that "the real cause lay in a torturing sense of sin and a longing of reconciliation with God, experienced by many deeply spiritual Christians at one time or another in their lives."⁹

And Boehmer:

We are not apt to go wrong if we assume that a resolution which had been prepared for the inner struggles of the last month, but which had been repressed until now by doubts and scruples of one kind or another, suddenly came to expression in that moment of extreme tension. For Luther was one of those men who make decisions only after long and tenacious struggles but whose decisions are crystallized abruptly in a moment of tempestuous activity. We may conclude that, inwardly, he was already on the way to the monastery before the lightning flashed down on him at Stotternheim. The convulsive fear which seized him in that moment only hastened the decision but did not call forth the mood from which it sprang.¹⁰

⁸Schwiebert, op. cit., pp. 142-3.

⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁰Heinrich Boehmer, Road to Reformation, Translated from the German by John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 34.

So Luther entered the Augustinian monastery, noted as the strictest of the orders, and it bore the highest reputation for theological learning. The Erfurt order belonged to the stricter "Observantine" branch. There were also the "Conventuals", who were less rigid. Here he hoped to win the favor of God. Here he hoped to merit the grace without which he must despair. Here he hoped soonest to reach the goal of perfection. That he did not, and why he did not, we shall soon see. It was here where he underwent, as he later described it, a great soul struggle. The five years, from his entrance into the monastery to his professorship at Wittenberg in 1512, are very important years in the development of Luther, which led eventually to the three cardinal principles of Scripture, "Sola Scriptura", "Sola Fide", and "Sola Gratia". However, it was the reading of Scripture which led him to understand the grace of God. The monastic life helped him to see the fruitlessness and hopelessness of meriting eternal life and the favor of God through good works. He later speaks of the monastic ideas as a sweet allurements, a poisonous pill coated with sugar.

When Luther entered the monastery there was a short time of probation, to see whether the applicant was in earnest. It is during this time that Luther tried to get the father's consent, though Schwiebert doubts that he even

tried to contact his parents.¹¹ If the man wishing to enter the monastery was in earnest, he was then initiated as a novice. The novitiate would last one year. When Luther said that he wanted "God's mercy and your society", and that he was willing to bear the heavy yoke of drudgery, poverty, chastity and obedience, he was taken in as a novice. During this period he was still at liberty to reconsider. A black gown with a short cowl and black belt was placed on him. He was to wear this at all times, even while sleeping. Luther's being received as a novice took place in September of 1505. His cell was a room of seven by ten feet, plainly furnished; a single table, chair and straw bed. There was no heat in the room.

As a novitiate, Luther was, like all other novices, instructed in the "prescribed acts of reverence and all the other external observances peculiar to the monastic life."¹² There were set prayers and he was drilled in the liturgical rituals and in the use of the breviary of the Order. He was taught how to sit, rise and eat; how to suppress laughter; how to walk about with eyes downcast and head bowed; and how to make himself understood by means of the sign language. Then there were other tests of character, such as cleaning and scrubbing his own cell and at times begging from door to door in the city. Luther probably felt sure he was walking

¹¹Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 146.

¹²Boehmer, op. cit., p. 39.

in the path the saints had trod. During this time the candidate was tested. The first year seemed to have been a year of inner peace and satisfaction.

Perhaps the greatest factor was that at this time the Latin translation of the Bible was placed into his hands. As Boehmer correctly states that "greater stress was laid on two other means of spiritual education; confession and the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures."¹³ A new code of statutes had come into force, drawn up by Staupitz, the Vicar of the Order, which enjoined, among other things, a study of Holy Writ. This red leather-bound copy of the Bible Luther read eagerly and learned devoutly and zealously, day after day. He was also required to confess once a week to the preceptor. When the novitiate was ended, probably in September of 1506, Luther was allowed to make the monastic life his profession. This met no opposition. The vow consisted mainly in the taking of the vow of obedience, poverty, and chastity. "At the end of the ceremony, as was customary, he was congratulated by the whole monastery on the fact that 'now he was like an innocent child who had just been baptized.'"¹⁴ He was then instructed to prepare himself for the priesthood. For this he was to study the Canon of the Mass by Gabriel Biel.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 41

This book initiated him into the mystery of the Mass, the very cornerstone of the whole sacramental system, and caused him rightly to appreciate the priestly vocation, truly a miracle worker in the sacrament. This book made a fervent disciple of papalism out of the young monk, for, says Luther in the same conversation: "When I read therein, my heart bled."¹⁵

In the spring of 1507 Luther was ordained a priest and he celebrated his first Mass on May 2, Cantate Sunday. This was a solemn occasion and even the nearest relatives and friends were permitted to come. The first mass was for him very difficult. It would be so easy to make a mistake. There were so many forms to observe. The thought that he, in all his frailty and unworthiness, should appear before the majesty of God, overwhelmed him. As Luther himself said: "At these words I was utterly stupified and terrified."¹⁶ After the mass a little feast was held at which the relatives and friends were present. Both his father and Vicar Braun were present. It is at this time that, when Martin mentioned to his father the Stotternheim experience, Hans replied: "But what if it were only a ghost?" that is, a devilish delusion.¹⁷ When Martin tried to justify himself, Hans further said: "Have you never heard the commandment, 'Honor thy father and thy mother'?" Martin never forgot these sayings.

¹⁵Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 148.

¹⁶Roland Bainton, Here I Stand (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 41.

¹⁷Boehmer, op. cit., p. 43.

Now Luther applied himself to advanced study. There were four steps in the training of a graduate student, leading to the Doctor's degree.¹⁸ After a long course of study the title "Biblicus" would be given, permitting one to deliver elementary lectures on the Bible. The second degree, "Formatus", meant that he had mastered the terminology of the medieval dictionaries. The third degree, "Sententiarius," entitled one to lecture on the first two books of Peter Lombard's "Sentences." The fourth step was "Licentiatatus," which permitted one to become a regular lecturer in theology. Luther applied himself with such zeal and success that about eighteen months after his first mass, in the fall of 1508, he was called to the University of Wittenberg. By the fall of 1509 he was already promoted to "Sententiarius". Just preceding this promotion, he was called back to Erfurt and then after a trip to Rome, he was at Wittenberg made a Doctor of Theology on October 18, 1512.

During these years of his study and lecturing at Erfurt and Wittenberg, between 1507 and his trip to Rome in November of 1510, Luther came into contact with different theological ideas as proposed and taught by Biel, Occam, d'Ailly, Augustine, Lombard and others. Luther was influenced for a time by Occam. According to Occam, the will of God is

¹⁸Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 148.

arbitrary and the will of man is free to choose. Man must remove the obstacles that stand in the way of his receiving grace. Man must do good works which must be accepted by the arbitrary will of God. This naturally intensified his religious struggles. Luther would with all earnestness strive to subdue himself till he should love God completely and alone. According to Occam, man's final destiny, heaven or hell, was fixed by God's external and immutable decree. It rested upon God's arbitrary will. And at such times there was before the eyes of Luther the picture of Christ as a stern judge.

Gabriel Biel, a student of Occam, whom Luther remembered almost word for word, went even further in his claims for man.

The human will can love God above all things through its own natural powers. The sinner is also able to remove the hindrances to grace, because he is able to keep from sinning and committing sinful acts, yea, to hate sin and to will not to sin. By the removal of the impediments and by the good steps toward God made by his own free will he can acquire the merit "de congruo," the first grace in the turning toward God.¹⁹

Need we wonder why Martin Luther, seeing God as an angry judge, worried and feared that he was falling short of that perfection which the elect of God must merit before they can be worthy of the "de congruo". Neither from Occam nor from Biel could Luther ever be sure that he advanced far enough to be certain that he had been accepted by Christ, that he had proved his worth. When this occurred, then he

¹⁹Ibid., p. 169.

could win the "meritum de condigno". He could merit then God's saving grace.

How much was Luther influenced by the Mystics? Much is made of this. But, just like with the Humanists, he took what was good and rejected the rest. Emotion was the key with the Mystics of coming in closer contact to God. At times Luther experienced this. Instead of striving, the individual must yield and throw himself upon God. Man is too weak; he should cease to strive. However, Luther could never be satisfied, because he knew that the enmity between man and God is too great.

We must discuss one more man who had a great deal of influence on Luther. That is Augustine. Though Luther remembered d'Ailly and Biel almost word for word, he remembered Augustine best of all.²⁰ Augustine's book "The Letter and the Spirit" influenced Luther deeply. Augustine began with the sovereignty of God. Man was created with a will toward good. When man fell into sin, it brought death and made him a slave to sin. Now man is divided into two classes, the elect and the lost. These were chosen from eternity. The lost had no hope whatever. The elect were "in need of preparation by God's divine saving grace."²¹ After the

²⁰Ibid., p. 157.

²¹Ibid., p. 159.

"gratia praeveniens" favorably disposed the elect towards God's saving purpose, man was changed that he was able to cooperate with God. To Augustine, justification was a life-long process, so that man could not be certain of his salvation till the end of life. Furthermore, the opposition of the Donatists forced Augustine to emphasize "that the Roman Catholic Church was the guardian of the truth, the interpreter of the Word, and God's highest revelation."²² Soon the dogma arose that "Outside the Church there was no salvation." The seven sacraments became the means of grace. "Slowly a new plan of salvation began to emerge in which the Word has been submerged beneath the all-sufficient grace which the Roman Church was able to offer in its sacramental system."²³

From a few of these studies of ideas and teachings with which Luther came into contact during these five years, need one wonder why Luther worked so hard in the monastery to make himself right with God, whom he pictured as a stern judge. Everything Luther was taught was that man must work out his own salvation. Luther felt that a person could never be sure of himself, that he had nothing to build on. You had in the Roman church, sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, excommunication and the interdict. Sacramentalism meant that there was no salvation without sacraments. Sacerdotalism

²²Ibid., p. 160.

²³Ibid., p. 161.

meant that the sacraments were valid only when given by ordained priests. Excommunication deprived an individual of the sacraments. If an interdict was used, the priests stopped functioning and heaven was closed to those people. Thus Luther worried, not because of a misunderstanding of Roman doctrine, but because that is what he was taught.

Thus we find various stages of Luther's feelings. At first he is satisfied in the monastery; holiness is guaranteed. Then doubts begin to enter. His experiences didn't agree with the teachings of the Church. If you commit sin, is God still gracious? Then comes a striving for holiness. Then he begins to wonder what good are works if you do them unwillingly, if you feel that you must.

This explains his conduct at the monastery. Why did he strive so hard? Here the enemies of Luther say that the trouble lay with himself. Some of these enemies are Duke George, Eck, Denifle and Grisar. They say his soul struggles are lies and exaggerations. Denifle goes so far as to say that the "concupiscence Luther refers to frequently was due to sexual problems."²⁴ The Catholic Encyclopedia makes the astounding assertion:

His morbid scrupulosity was due to infractions of rules, breaches of discipline, distorted practices, followed in quick succession with increasing gravity, made life an agony. . . abandoned Breviary for weeks. . . disregarded counsels of confessor. . .

²⁴Ibid., p. 153.

This abnormal condition produced a brooding, melancholy, physical, mental, spiritual depression, which later by a strange process of reasoning, he ascribed to the teaching of the church concerning good works, while all the while he was living in direct and absolute opposition to its doctrinal teaching and disciplinary code.²⁵

What lies! What a gross misrepresentation! His life in this period is above reproach. Fife mentions that Flacius cites in 1549, that he met an old convent associate of Luther who testified to the blameless character of his life in the cloister.²⁶ It was an attempt by Luther to reach the "stern judge" and to follow the teachings of the Church which gave him no peace.

Luther entered the monastery to get closer to God, to win His favor, and for that reason he taxed his body to the utmost. Luther read the Bible to compare that with what he learned in the classroom. He did everything he could to quiet his inner unrest, to find an answer for his soul. Luther's conscience would not permit him to live a life of ease, to ignore any of the rituals or prescriptions. As he himself says:

Being a monk, I wished to omit nothing of the prayers and often overtaxed myself with my courses and written work. I assembled my hours for an entire week and

²⁵The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), IX, p. 441.

²⁶Robert Fife, Young Luther, (New York: The McMillan Company, 1928), p. 95.

sometimes even two or three. Sometimes I would lock myself up for two or three entire days at a time, with neither food nor drink, until I had completed by breviary.²⁷

And again Luther says in a sermon of 1537:

I myself was a monk for twenty years and so plagued myself with prayers, fastings, wakings and freezings that I almost died of cold, which hurt me so much, that I would never want to attempt it again even though I were able. What else did I seek through this but God? Who was to see how I observed the rules and lived such a rigid life?²⁸

When Luther entered the monastery, he had received the second "baptism". Yet he never achieved that inner peace but would always think of God as a stern judge from whom he wanted to flee. At another time Luther says:

When I was a monk, I believed that it was all up with my salvation. Each time I experienced the temptations of the flesh, that is to say, a number of evil desires, such as anger, hatred, jealousy, in regard to a brother, etc., I tried all kinds of remedies. I confessed daily, but it was of no avail; the covetousness always returned. This is the reason why I could find no peace, but was perpetually in torment, thinking: "You have committed such and such a sin. You are still the victim of jealousy and concupiscence; in vain you have joined the order. All your good works are useless."²⁹

Luther availed himself of the opportunity of confession many times. Every sin had to be confessed. Luther in his zealousness would search and search himself for every possible sin, that the confessor told him to come in with something

²⁷Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 150.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 153.

really to forgive. Afterwards Luther warns against "whimsical sins, wanton sins, half-sins and imaginary sins."³⁰ Luther had no real, grievous, sensual sins. They were such as he mentions, anger, hatred, jealousy against a brother. When he could find no more, he would look for sins which in reality did not exist. Such was his attempt to win the favor of a stern judge, as taught by the Church. Let me quote Luther once more, wherein he states that the cause of his struggle was not on account of women and money, but to appease a stern judge.

In the monastery we had enough to eat and drink, but the heart and conscience suffered pain and martyrdom, and the sufferings of the soul are the most painful. I was often frightened by the name of Christ, and when I looked upon Him and the cross, He seemed to me like unto a flash of lightning. When His name was mentioned, I would rather have heard the devil mentioned, for I believed that I would have to do good works until Christ was rendered gracious to me through them. In the convent I thought neither of money nor of the wealth of the world nor of women; but my heart trembled and was agitated thinking how I might render God favorable to it. For I had departed from the faith, and I could not make myself believe anything but that I had offended God, whom I would have to make favorable again through my good works. But thank God, we again have His Word, which pictures and portrays Christ as our righteousness.³¹

One more statement concerning this struggle of the soul by Luther. No one can give us a clearer picture than the

³⁰Julius Köstlin, The Theology of Luther, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay, Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897, I, p. 55.

³¹Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 154.

person himself. Therefore, let us hear from him once again:

I always walked around in a dream and real idolatry for I did not believe in Christ but believed Him to be nothing else than a stern and terrible judge, as one paints Him sitting on a rainbow. For this reason I sought other intercessors, Mary and the saints and my own good deeds and merits of faith. All this I could not do for money or possessions, but for God's own sake; yet, it was all a false religion and idolatry because I did not know Christ and I did not seek to do these things through and in Him.³²

Thus we have some of Luther's own statements which tell us of his struggles and the reasons for them. It was the search of a man trying to find inner calm. It was the search of a man with a sharp conscience. The church said to do penance, but the conscience said that it doesn't help, so that the soul had to cry out, "Oh, when wilt thou become truly pious and do sufficient to attain a gracious God."³³ Of his trying to find peace and of the system of penances, he says:

Under the papacy they inculcated in us that Christ would come as judge, and although they read the Gospel daily, they proclaimed Him as judge and insisted that we should make satisfaction for our sins. To this end they established the saints and Mary as intercessors. Formerly we were thus subject to judgment and the thought of the Son of God was a cause of terror. . . .When I beheld Christ, I seemed to see the devil. Hence the invocation, O Mary, pray for us to thy Son and assuage His anger. . . .It is an old evil, rotten tree that has rooted itself in me, for it is a doctrine according to reason that he who commits sin shall make satisfaction for it.³⁴

³²Ibid., p. 155.

³³Herman Preus, The Communion of Saints (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1948), p. 13.

³⁴Preus, Ibid.

Yes, Martin Luther could honestly say that he observed the rules so strictly, that if ever a monk had gotten into heaven by being a monk, surely he would have been there. Mention might be made here that Luther probably accepted the principle of "Sola Scriptura" about 1508-1509, while teaching at Wittenberg. In his persevering study of Holy Writ, Luther would find the real truth which ultimately led to the posting of the Theses and the split of the Roman Church. However, let us remember the entire background; that Luther always considered himself a loyal member of the church, that the pope was the interpreter, that satisfaction had to be made for sins. The full perception of the truth and the conception of the "sola gratia and sola fide" came only by degrees, a gradual unfolding. Only in such a manner can we explain his attitude till 1517. Nor, in view of what we have seen, is this out of the question. Rather it is very natural.

When Luther returned from Wittenberg to Erfurt again in 1509, to lecture on the "Sentences" of Peter Lombard, he had progressed to the point of criticizing many of the Scholastics. He still regarded himself as an Occamist. He had advanced enough in the principle of "Sola Scriptura" to criticize Augustine. He liked Lombard because he stressed faith rather than reason. Luther depended on no one, but was gradually finding his way out of this darkness of popery as he applied himself more and more to the sacred Word of God.

At this point, however, he is not far advanced enough to realize that eventually the whole Catholic plan of salvation would be destroyed.

While teaching at Erfurt Luther in November of 1510 made his journey to Rome. This episode of Luther's life also is full of legends. Luther could not but fail to be shocked by the things he saw. He returned from Rome still faithful to the church and loyal to the pope. However, later it was easier to attack the pope because of what he had seen and heard. He could not have attacked it so vigorously in 1520 had it not been for what he saw in 1510. Because of this he later said that he would not take a thousand gulden not to have seen it. As Luther returned he was more clearly how wrong and blind he had been. By 1519 he calls the pope the Antichrist.

Luther left on the journey to Rome in November of 1510. This fall date is fairly certain because of a reference made by Luther on an occasion at the table. He mentions that one morning he and his traveling companions were so thirsty that they were tempted to drink water, which was deadly, but instead they were given the poisoned wine. It was such an unusual incident, that it must be true if Luther remembered it. And since poisonings do not ripen in Italy till the fall, the journey must have begun in November.

CHAPTER V

THE TRIP TO ROME

While teaching at Erfurt Luther in November of 1510 made his journey to Rome. This episode of Luther's life also is full of legends. Luther could not but fail to be shocked by the things he saw. He returned from Rome still faithful to the church and loyal to the pope. However, later it was easier to attack the pope because of what he had seen and heard. He could not have attacked it so vigorously in 1520 had it not been for what he saw in 1510. Because of this he later said that he would not take a thousand gulden not to have seen it. As Luther matured he saw more clearly how wrong and blind he had been. By 1519 he calls the pope the Antichrist.

Luther left on the journey to Rome in November of 1510. This fall date is fairly certain because of a reference made by Luther on an occasion at the table. He mentions that one morning he and his traveling companion were so thirsty that they were tempted to drink water, which was deadly, but instead they were given two pomegranates. It was such an unusual incident, that it must be true if Luther remembered it. And since pomegranates do not ripen in Italy till the fall, the journey must have begun in November.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century there were sentiments for reform in many places. We find this sentiment also in the order of the Augustinian Hermits. Egidio Antonio Canisio was made the General of the Order on May 22, 1507. He hoped that he would be able to bring about reform in the Order, a return to the strict observance of the rules. John Staupitz, the Vicar of the German Congregation, hoped that such reform, with the help of Egidio, could be achieved in Germany. There were twenty-nine in the Observantine group. It was hoped that these could be united. On September 30, 1510, a bull was published, making the act of union official. All but seven of the twenty-nine Observantine convents agreed. The seven who protested were afraid that the union with the lax Conventuals would corrupt the Order. The most prominent of these seven were the two largest and most influential, the monasteries at Erfurt and Nuernberg. Despite the bull, it was decided to appeal to the pope and for this purpose to send two of the brothers to Italy. The one was the "litis procurator", the man in charge of the mission, while Luther was the traveling companion, for the Augustinians were required to travel by twos.

Since the distance to Rome was about 850 miles, it must have taken the two about forty days, estimating that twenty-five miles was a good day's journey. Being provided with letters of introduction, the journey must not have been too inconvenient. With these letters of introduction they could

stop over anywhere at the monasteries of the Augustinian Hermits for lodging. Towards the end of December the two reached the Via Cassia, where one could catch the first glance of the Eternal City. Later Luther remarks that when he first saw Rome, he threw himself to the ground and said: "Blessed be thou, Holy Rome." It was probably early in January that they arrived at the Augustinian monastery, Santa Maria del Popolo. It was here where they took up quarters in Rome.

Rome was an old city filled with old ruins. The streets were narrow and dirty. It was a center of corruption and luxury, of low moral and religious life. There were, it is true, some seventy monasteries and churches. Many of the great churches held regular services only during Advent and Lent. Many monasteries were even closed and many of the nunneries had been turned into "houses of joy."

When Admiral Philip of Burgundy visited in Rome in 1509, he wrote: "The heathen live more chastely and innocently than these people who now draft the ecclesiastical laws for all Christendom." He added that all they cared for was money and things he did not even dare to mention. Erasmus, who visited Rome about this same time, stated that he heard with his own ears "abominable blasphemies against Christ and his apostles."¹

What were Luther's experiences in Rome? The two messengers probably the next day got in touch with the Procurator of the Order and presented their appeal. Egidio might have

¹E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 185.

denied their request immediately, but he delayed about four weeks, probably in the interest of good will. This gave Luther time to visit Rome. Luther wanted to make the pilgrimage to the seven principal churches of the city. But, first he wanted to make a general confession. Here he met with unlearned priests, who did not know how to make confession. "This was the first and (remembering what his feelings were at that time) perhaps the deepest disappointment which the Holy City had in store for him."²

Luther, after the confession, was ready to begin the strenuous task of visiting the seven churches in one day. In order to receive Communion at the end of the journey one also had to fast. While at the Lateran Palace, Luther climbed the "Scala Sancta." The "Scala Sancta" were twenty-eight steps and were supposed to be the ones that Christ had walked up to Pilate's "praetorium" in Jerusalem. These steps Luther climbed very piously, kissing them, praying a "Pater Noster" on each step. He was assured this would release his grandfather Heine from purgatory. Legend has it that when he reached the top the thought came to him, "The just shall live by faith." However, Luther's son, Paul, mentions this. At the time Paul heard this he was only eleven and he did not write it down till thirty-eight years

²Heinrich Boehmer, Road to Reformation, Translated from the German by John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 62.

later. What Luther actually thought at the top step was:
"Who knows whether this is true?"

There were also many altars at which a single Mass could free a soul from purgatory. Luther later could not even recall how many Masses he said. Besides saying these Masses and visiting the seven churches, Luther ran like a "mad saint through all the churches and crypts."³ He was hoping to do all he could to free his relatives from purgatory. He even mentions he was sorry his parents weren't dead yet, that he could here free them from purgatory. He also visited the catacombs. There were some relics he could not see, for they required special permission from the pope. The pope at the moment was in Mirandola. But there were many relics which Luther did see and cherish, such as: the wall behind which the slain children of Bethlehem were buried, the chain of Paul, a stone with the footprint of Christ, eleven thorns of Christ's crown of thorns, a nail from the Cross, a few pieces from the burning bush, the rod with which Moses struck the rock, a piece of silver with which Judas betrayed the Savior, and many others. How many relics Luther saw we'll probably never know. No wonder he acted like "mad". He mentions that he believed "everything that was invented there were stinking lies." At this time Luther never doubted that these relics were genuine, that everything he had been told was true.

³Boehmer, Ibid., p. 66.

Mention might be made of one more thing that disgusted Luther. It was the haphazard way in which many of the priests would say Mass. Some could not read the Latin correctly; some would hurry through the Mass, that in one hour seven masses had been celebrated. Luther mentions the following incident:

The priests could say Mass in such a cocksure and slapdash fashion, as if they were doing a juggling act, for before I had come to the Gospel, the celebrant beside me had already finished his Mass and was calling to me, "'passa', 'passa', hurry up, have done with it."⁴

Toward the end of January, Egidio gave the verdict, denying the appeal. The two started on their return journey and arrived at Nuernberg around the middle of March. The report was given and the seven Observantine convents thought that Egidio might still weaken, so another delegation was sent. After an absence of five months, Luther returned in April to Erfurt. Meanwhile, Staupitz stated he intended to carry through with the union. Luther and Lang of Erfurt voted to make peace with Staupitz. Because of this, it seems very likely that Luther and Lang both were sent into "exile" and both went to Wittenberg under Staupitz. This move of Luther to Wittenberg came in the summer of 1511. Later Staupitz dropped the idea of a union and peace was restored. Staupitz was even re-elected vicar-general.

⁴Boehmer, Ibid., p. 167.

Luther was later supported by Erfurt in the Leipzig Debate of 1519. Even by 1516, when Luther was district vicar, Erfurt did not object when he made John Lang the prior of the Erfurt cloister.

Boehmer has a beautiful summary of the significance of the Rome trip on his inner development:

As far as the journey to Rome is concerned, the most that can be attributed to it is a negative significance, for it definitely destroyed his cherished hope that he would find satisfaction for his inner needs in Holy Rome. Even if the acquisition of the abundant indulgences in the Eternal City did give him some comfort at the time, his old doubts and fears returned very soon. Now that even his hope was shattered, his bouts and fears probably caused him more anxiety than ever before. Accordingly if he had been required to give an account of the effect which this "mad pilgrimage" had on his inner life, he would probably have expressed it in the same words which he used a quarter of a century later: "Like a fool, I carried onions to Rome and brought back garlic."⁵

The greatest outcome of the trip and of far reaching importance was that, because of his conflict with Erfurt, he was brought to Wittenberg under Staupitz. His contact and conversations with Staupitz came as a result of this transfer. Thus Wittenberg became the center of activity of one of the most stupendous events in history, the Reformation.

⁵Boehmer, Ibid., p. 80.

CHAPTER VI

THE AWAKENING AT WITTENBERG

"A poor, unsightly town with small, old, ugly, squat wooden houses, more like an old village than a town"¹— that is Wittenberg as seen by Myconius. This is the city where Dr. Martin Luther spent the greater part of his life. This is the city where the fraud and oppression of Rome was put to a stop. Wittenberg dates back to the year 1174. The streets were laid at right angles and the city was surrounded by a moat and a wall. The name of Wittenberg was given because of the great white hill of sand on which it stands. Though Wittenberg was an old city and though Luther wondered how the Elector Frederick could have ever conceived the idea of building a university there, it was an average town of around 392 houses and a population of 2,146. Here, too, the religious atmosphere was Catholic.

When Frederick III of Saxony in 1486 became a member of the Electoral College, he made Wittenberg the capital of his territory. He began a program to beautify Wittenberg. He improved many buildings, rebuilt the Castle and the Castle Church, rebuilt the Augustinian Monastery, and built some homes for some professors. In 1502, though the universities

¹Heinrich Boehmer, Road to Reformation, Translated from the German by John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 47.

of Erfurt and Leipzig were not far away, Frederick founded the University of Wittenberg. It opened with an attendance of 416, then dropped quite low, but in 1522 it had an enrollment of over one thousand, much larger than Leipzig or Erfurt.

Wittenberg was well taken care of religiously. There were two monasteries, three chapels, the parish church, and the Castle Church. The Castle Church had been renovated by Frederick and contained many relics which attracted people from far and wide. In 1511 there were eight aisles containing 5,005 relics. By 1518 there were 17,443 relics. Among these relics were: 35 particles from the Cross; a piece from the burning bush; a part of the rock on which Jesus stood when He wept over Jerusalem; another piece from the Mount of Calvary; the gown of the Virgin Mary and some milk from her breast; some hay and straw from the manger; the swaddling clothes; and 204 particles and one entire skeleton of the innocent babes of Bethlehem. One can see their popularity still more when one considers the thousands of years of indulgences that could be had by adoring these relics.

At Wittenberg Luther came under the influence of a man who urged him to become a licentiate and a Doctor of Theology. That man was Johann von Staupitz, who became Luther's friend and spiritual advisor. Luther once said: "If it had not been for Dr. Staupitz, I should have sunk into hell." After Staupitz in September, 1511, had conferred the doctor's cap on

four Augustinian Hermits, he met Luther under the pear tree in the garden north of the Black Cloister. Staupitz suggested that Luther become a doctor and a preacher. A little later he again met Luther under the pear tree, where he again urged Luther to become a preacher and a doctor. Luther gave fifteen reasons why he felt he could not. Then the conversation went like this:

Staupitz: O my friend, be not wiser than the whole convent and the Fathers.

Luther: Your honor, Mr. Staupitz, you will deprive me of my life.

Staupitz: Do you not know that our Lord hath many things to be done? Then he needs intelligent people to counsel Him. Should you die, you would become the Lord's counsel in heaven, for He also needs several doctors.²

Finally, Luther agreed. Since the appointment of preachers was vested with the vicar-general, Luther immediately began to preach in the refectory. However, almost a year elapsed between his permission to receive the doctor's degree and his actually becoming a doctor. Why this delay? Undoubtedly because of money. The fees for the doctor's degree were fifty guildens, or about \$470. The only person to whom Luther could go was to the Elector. He promised to give the fifty guildens, providing Luther would fill the chair of lecturer on the Bible on the theological faculty for the remainder of his life.

²E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 194.

Though this chair belonged to Staupitz, he agreed. Because of his duties as vicar-general, he had not occupied this chair for some time. But it was not until the fall of 1512 that these arrangements had been completed. Meanwhile Luther had gone to Cologne to settle the afore-mentioned controversy between the Observantines. He was promoted to subprior of the Wittenberg cloister. He was now given a room with heat for his own use. This was the famous "tower room", where Luther made his discovery of justification by faith. The room was on the second floor of the tower.

On October 4, 1512, Luther was granted the licentiate, that is, permission from the faculty to become a doctor. At this time he had to swear allegiance to the Church at Rome. On the ninth of October he went to Leipzig to receive the fifty guildens. On the eighteenth of October the preliminary service for the promotion was held and on the next morning the ceremony itself was observed. Here Luther again took an oath of loyalty. He was presented first a closed and then an open Bible. A hat of wool was placed on his head and a silver doctor's ring on his finger. Then followed a disputation lasting several hours. That he was now a doctor did not mean he was a member of the theological faculty. His formal reception as a member of the faculty, which consisted of five persons, took place three days later, on October 22. The next Monday he began his lectures on the Bible, probably on Genesis.

Luther drew later much comfort from his oath given when he became a doctor. He had pledged himself to defend the Holy Scriptures, to teach them faithfully, and to defend them against false teachers. This he was going to do. However, when Luther received the doctor's degree, he was still in turmoil. He states on May 23, 1537, that when he became a doctor he had not yet seen "the light."

It is well to emphasize again the turmoil and spiritual condition of Luther at this time. Remember that Luther was a man of conviction, that he was honest, and that he had a sharp conscience. He used every means of work-righteousness that the Church had to offer. He made three general confessions instead of just one. He fasted, prayed and buffeted himself. But his anxiety over his sins were only heightened. The more he fasted and prayed, the more he ruined his physical health. The picture of the Last Judgment and the fear of hell were always present with him. He saw the demanding, angry God; not the gracious, loving God. He saw Christ sitting on the rainbow. Above all, it was the firm belief that God required absolute purity and total surrender, and the honesty with which he judged his own heart. He was a pious Catholic. His question was: "How can I be assured of the forgiveness of God and thus win the favor of God?" There were moments of ease and peace, especially when he was so busy, when he had no time to think of imaginary sins. But all he needed to hear was the term "righteousness" and he was in the

depths of hell again. It was in this state of mind that he came to Wittenberg. Now he came into contact with Staupitz, but above all, now he was to teach the inspired Word of God.

Staupitz influenced Luther more than in just urging him to become a doctor. Staupitz was a man who could not help but be kind to all. He adheres very closely to the idea that man can earn salvation through the use of the seven sacraments. These are signs to him that he belongs to the elect. Luther often came to Staupitz to see whether he were one of the elect. Staupitz told Luther to think of the wounds of Christ, on His image, who was predestined by God to suffer for sinners. Another statement of Staupitz that helped Luther was that repentance begins with the love of God.³ That was contrary to Biel who taught that repentance begins with a love of self. In the same light Staupitz told Luther to come forth with real, genuine sins. He tried in such a way to minimize the turmoil and fear of Luther. All of these sayings and comforts helped Luther at times. They helped prepare the way to the "discovery". But they could not quiet his fears, for Luther had been trained too much since his youth and at the monastery and university of Erfurt in work-righteousness. Luther did not see in the crucified Christ the love of God, but the wrath of God with sin and sinners. But it did serve to awaken him and drive him to a

³Boehmer, op. cit., p. 104.

study of the Scriptures. It was in the Scriptures that Luther discovered the full, saving truth. And even then there was a slow development in his theological thinking. Even after the "tower discovery", Luther had to continue to search the Scriptures. He even states that he did not fully grasp the meaning of justification as Paul knew it until 1520. Luther knew but little Greek or Hebrew by 1511. The first Greek New Testament by Erasmus did not appear until 1516. As Luther matured, his understanding of the Bible became clearer. So when one remembers the entire background and training of Luther, it is easy to understand how slow his progress was. One cannot help but think of how slowly a convert discovers the full truth as he takes adult instructions. Here Luther had to find his own way through the whole maze of medieval theology. Luther soon accepted the Bible as the sole source of inspiration, but it was another thing to discover how far the Catholic Church had been swept from the teachings of the Apostles. After the posting of the "Ninety-five Theses" and the Leipzig Debate in 1519, Luther developed into maturity quickly.

As far as lectures are concerned, the instructors at Wittenberg did not have to announce more than one course and lecture more than two or three hours a week. He could give lectures over again. Thus Luther taught Genesis from 1512 to 1513; Psalms from August 16, 1513, to October 21, 1515; Romans from November 3, 1515, to September 5, 1516; Galatians

from October 27, 1516, to March 10, 1517; Hebrews from March 27, 1517, to April of 1518. His last lectures on Genesis were from June 3, 1535, to November 17, 1545. All in all Luther gave sixteen courses of lectures and treated thirteen books.

We must not forget that Luther was not only an instructor. Luther had been preacher in the monastery since the fall of 1511, and in 1514 he was preacher at the parish church. Thus he was preaching at least twice a week. At first Luther's sermons were entirely Catholic in doctrine and full of philosophical expressions and references to Aristotle and famous scholastics. They were filled with allegorizing. Later, however, the sermons became lively and powerful. One thinks of his sermons in 1516 and 1517 on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, and in 1517 an explanation of the seven penitential psalms. When in 1517 he preached at Dresden on the certainty of salvation in Christ, one of the women remarked that she could die in peace if she could just hear another sermon like that. Luther had a very good voice. Henry Stromer of Auerbach wrote in 1518 "that he had heard 'Martin Luther, a man famous for his eloquence.'"⁴ He also had the secret of effective preaching when he once remarked that he preached as simply as he could, so that the common people and children could understand.

⁴Harold Grimm, Martin Luther as a Preacher (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1929), p. 17.

Besides preaching, Luther was subprior of the Black Cloister since May, 1512. In this capacity he had to tutor the student-monks at least an hour a day, as well as counsel them. In May, 1515, at Gotha, he was made district vicar over eleven convents in Meissen and Thuringia. These he had to visit yearly and write to them. This hardly gave him time to celebrate mass and recite the breviary. He relates how he had been so busy at times that he neglected the breviary; that on Saturdays he would lock himself in the room, without eating or drinking, and devote himself to prayer.

When did Luther's famous "tower discovery" take place? First let us stress once more that while preparing for his lectures and while delivering them, he used the Bible. Though there might have been a few other influences, Luther's development and awakening came from a direct study of the Holy Scriptures. As to the exact moment of the "tower discovery" there are two predominant opinions. Some place the discovery in the period of the preparation of his lectures on the Psalms in the summer of 1513; while others place the discovery in the middle of his lectures on the Psalms, towards the end of 1514. Let us see both views. Boehmer holds to the opinion that the discovery took place in the summer of 1513.⁵ During this summer Luther was

⁵Boehmer, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

preparing his summaries on the Psalms. He used also the commentary by James Lefèvre. All went well until he came to Psalm 31. The familiar passage was there "In Thy righteousness deliver me". Here Luther always thought of the judicial righteousness of God. He hated that word, for he feared God. Then he turned to Romans once again, determined to find the real sense and meaning of that word. Schwiebert believes that the discovery took place in the fall of 1514.⁶ The term "In Thy righteousness deliver me" appears both in Psalm 31 and Psalm 71. Schwiebert feels that there is little change in interpretation in Psalm 31, but that in Psalm 71 it is evident that Luther had discovered the light. Thus he places the discovery towards the end of 1514.

Luther describes this "tower discovery" which changed his life and influenced Christendom in the following words:

In the meantime in the same year (1519) I had begun again to lecture on the Psalter, believing that with my classroom experience in lecturing on the Psalms and the Letters of Paul to the Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, I was now better prepared. All the while I was absorbed with the passionate desire to get better acquainted with the author of Romans. Not that I did not succeed, as I had resolved, in penetrating more deeply into the subject in my investigation, but I stumbled over the words (chapter 1:17) concerning the "righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel." For the concept "God's righteousness" was repulsive to me, as I was accustomed to interpret it according to scholastic philosophy, namely, as the "formal or active" righteousness, in which God proves Himself righteous in that He punishes the sinner as an unrighteous person. . . until, after days and nights

⁶Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 287.

of wrestling with the problem, God finally took pity on me, so that I was able to comprehend the inner connection between the two expressions, "The righteousness of God as revealed in the Gospel" and "The just shall live by faith."

Then I began to comprehend the "righteousness of God" through which the righteous are saved by God's grace, namely, through faith; that the "righteousness of God" which is revealed through the Gospel was to be understood in a passive sense in which God through mercy justifies man by faith, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." Now I felt exactly as though I had been born again, and I believed that I had entered Paradise through widely opened doors. I then went through the Holy Scriptures as far as I could recall from memory, and I found in other parts the same sense: the "work of God" is that through which He works in us, the "strength of God" is that through which he makes us strong, the "wisdom of God" that through which he makes us wise, and so the "power of God," the "blessing of God," and the "honor of God," are likewise to be interpreted.

As violently as I had formerly hated the expression "righteousness of God", so I was now as violently compelled to embrace the new conception of grace, and thus, for me, the expression of the Apostle really opened the Gates of Paradise.⁷

This was the "tower discovery". This was the conversion of Luther. This was the turning point in the history of Luther, of the Church and of the world. This is what makes Luther, the Reformer. He rediscovered that which is essentially Christian. He revived the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ. Now after much darkness, there was a new light. The fundamental truth, which he later designated as the article by which a Christian Church stands or falls, is here established. He is not aware that it will lead him to separate

⁷ Ibid., pp. 285-6.

himself from the Catholic Church. He need no longer be terrified because of God, but now saw the meaning of the righteousness declared in the Gospel. However, the change was slow. He had four full years to mature, without suspecting what his destiny would be. We do not find any scientifically or logically formulated system of doctrine, but we do find a maturing as the years go by. There is a change both in his method of lectures and in the content thereof.

When Luther began his lectures on the Psalms, he followed the medieval method of giving a word-for-word explanation of the Latin text called "Glossae," and then, when he deemed it necessary, an interpretation of the passages called "Scholia." Luther also followed the principle that the text had a fourfold meaning: the literal, allegorical, tropological or moralistic, and anagogical. In Romans the "Glossae" and "Scholia" still remained, but he lectured mostly on the grammatical historical method. He refrained from using allegory, except in the pulpit. He also used more and more the original text. In Galatians and Hebrews the "Glossae" and "Scholia" have been discarded and he uses the literal and spiritual sense. His presentations are much clearer.

Not only in method do we notice a change, but also in content. After the "tower discovery" the grace of God shines more clearly. His lectures become more Christ-centered. Luther in the spring of 1515 rejoiced over his

progress in understanding the Bible, in growing in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. Luther portrayed Christ as the God-man who atoned for the sins of the world. Thus he wrote in 1516 to Georg Spenlein:

Therefore, my sweet brother, learn Christ and Him crucified, learn to sing unto Him and despairing in thyself to say to Him: Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness, but I am Thy sin; Thou has taken what is mine and given me what is Thine; Thou hast taken what Thou wast not and given me what I was not, Beware, lest at any time thou shouldst aspire to such purity, that thou wouldst not appear unto thee as a sinner, yes, be one. For Christ dwells only in sinners. Meditate on that love of His, and thou shalt see His sweetest consolation. For if it were necessary to attain to peace of conscience through our labors and afflictions, wherefore did He die? Therefore only in Him, sincerely despairing of thyself and thy works, thou shalt find peace. Thou shalt, moreover, learn from Him how He has received thee and made thy sins His own as well as His righteousness thy own.⁸

In Romans we find that Luther rejoices and mentions that the entire Holy Scriptures and heaven were opened to him.

Luther had to change his conception of God. God had been pictured as a stern judge sitting on the rainbow. God seemed remote. That brought in the magic of the sacramental system and its ideas of merit and satisfaction. As Luther probed the Scriptures and studied Paul, he realized more and more that God was not a stern judge, but a merciful, loving, heavenly Father, who loved the world so much that He sent His only Son. God did not wait for man to prove himself, but

⁸Lewis W. Spitz, "Luther's Concept of the Atonement Before 1517", Concordia Theological Monthly, (March, 1950), p. 178.

sought man while yet a condemned sinner.

Luther had to rework much of the terminology such as grace, faith, justification, good works, original sin, etc. He had to rework this terminology from the standpoint of the Gospel occupying the central place. Thus in good works, loving the neighbor did not begin, as taught, with self-love, but with a repudiation of oneself. Again, the monastic life was no special profession, but all men were priests in God's sight. Also in the matter of the church his concept was changing. At first he is still a good Catholic. He doesn't question the authority of the church, but defends it against heretics and schismatics. But he does begin to preach against the abuses and corruption everywhere. There is too much indifference and hypocrisy. He criticizes the religious pilgrimages. The clergy failed to preach the Word of God. He spoke against the evil of indulgences. However, he spoke more against individuals than the Church. He was not in revolt with the Church. He came to think of the Church as a spiritual body and conversion made one a member. However, the medium of the Gospel was still the Roman hierarchy. It was not until the years of 1517 and 1521 that Luther saw that the Roman hierarchy was not the medium for the Gospel and the grace of God.

What is very important is that Luther had by 1517 gained the upper hand of the theological faculty at Wittenberg. Aristotle fell into decline. Latin, Greek and Hebrew were

to be stressed and the Bible was to be the sole guide, though this final plan was not realized until 1523. Among the eight professors won over by Luther were Carlstadt and von Arnsdorf. When Luther nailed the "Ninety-Five Theses" on the door of the Castle Church, he had the complete support of the faculty at Wittenberg.

CHAPTER VII

THE INDULGENCES

Indulgences can be traced to the wars between the Mohammedans and the Christians. The Mohammedans thought that when a soldier died in battle, his soul would immediately go to heaven. In order to increase their armies, the pope of the eleventh century granted absolution to Christians who died in battle. Then in the Crusades a new indulgence was proclaimed which gave remission of penitential punishment to those who fought against the Mohammedans. Then a means was sought to help those who were not physically fit to go to war. If such would make a payment covering the cost of sending a soldier, it would count as though they themselves had taken part in the Crusades. After the Crusades were ended, it was necessary to find some new means to satisfy the masses, as well as to satisfy the "Curia's" need for money. So Pope Boniface VIII established the Jubilee Indulgences in the year 1300. The people were to make a pilgrimage to Rome and there leave their money. This jubilee was to be held every hundred years. However, it was so popular that Clement VI, in 1343, reduced this interval to fifty years. Then Urban VI, in 1389, reduced it to thirty-three years, because of Jesus' thirty-three years upon earth. Finally, in 1470, Paul II reduced it to twenty-five years.

An indulgence letter or confessional letter was also introduced, which was tangible evidence of heavenly forgiveness and was given to any who could pay the required tax. Finally, in 1476, Sixtus IV established indulgences for the dead in purgatory. Though the latter was never legalized, yet it wasn't forbidden. Even by 1517 there was no official decision on indulgences; yet by papal pronouncements and because of their need of money, it was heretical to doubt the saving power of indulgences. As the Catholic Clayton admits:

The value of Christ's life and death was infinite; the merits of Christ's immaculate Mother, and of the many holy men and women of heroic virtues and attested sanctity, were abundant and superabundant. Thus was provided a treasure of pardons that might be shared by all penitent souls. The guardian and dispenser of the treasure was the pope to whom as possessor of the keys of St. Peter it was granted to make available the riches of these merits, and to extend to souls in purgatory the benefits of an indulgence. The doctrine was not defined; it was left to theologians to explain its significance. But when it came, as come it did, that in outward appearance the money contribution for the specific good work was made the one conspicuously needful thing to gain the papal indulgence, then it is easy to see how the doctrine could be used for financial ends . . . Money was the thing that was wanted, money was the thing that indulgences procured. There was no pretence that money was not the object of the indulgence.¹

Yes, the people thought that these indulgences also gave them remission of sins, and, though officially the Church did not

¹William Dallman, "A Catholic on Luther" (Excerpts from Joseph Clayton's "Luther and His Work"), The American Lutheran, (November, 1945), XXVIII p. 10.

teach this, they did nothing to correct the misunderstanding. This they did not do because it brought in too much money.

In the above quotation, Clayton also reveals how the indulgences work. Penance consisted of three parts: (1) a sincere contrition of heart, (2) an oral confession and the absolution from sins and eternal punishment, and (3) satisfaction by good works. Such works could be a building of a church, pilgrimages, helping the poor, etc. Now when an indulgence was bought, the requirement for good works had been satisfied. How can this be? In heaven there is a treasury filled with the merits of Christ, Mary, and all the saints. Thus the purchase of an indulgence could relieve a man from temporal punishment and from purgatory.

Now in 1513 three church positions were vacant in Northern Germany: The Archbishopric of Magdeburg, the Bishopric of Halberstadt, and the Archbishopric of Mainz. The Hohenzollerns saw this as their opportunity for rise in honor and power. Elector Joachim of Brandenburg wanted these three positions for his younger brother Albert, who was but twenty-three. He was ready to pay what was necessary, for Albert was below the age required for an archbishop and it was illegal to hold more than one position at a time. He was ready to buy those three positions, for papal dispensation was needed. For the Archbishopric of Magdeburg and the Bishopric of Halberstadt, he had to pay a fee of 1,107 ducats,

or about \$25,000. These were obtained by December 16, 1513. But it was much harder to receive also the Archbishopric of Mainz. Albert finally also received the latter, for which he had to pay the "Curia" 10,000 ducats, in addition to the fee of 12,300 ducats. He really was in debt now, and so to finance this, it was handled through the House of Fugger. The Fuggers were the wealthiest banking house in Europe. But the Fuggers also needed security. From the pope came the suggestion of issuing indulgences in Mainz, Magdeburg, Halberstadt, and the Brandenburg lands. After the expenses were deducted, half was to go to the building of St. Peter's in Rome and the other half to the Fuggers. At the same time, all the people were told was that the money would be used for St. Peter's in Rome.

Though many vendors were used, the best known is John Tetzel. He is better known because it was he who was peddling in Jueterbock and Zerbst, about twenty miles from Wittenberg. He was a Dominican monk with quite a terrible reputation. Whether he actually used the following phrase is not certain, but he did use something similar: "As soon as the money clinks in the chest, the soul flits into heavenly rest."² He was a master salesman. He preached three different sermons. First, he preached on "Hell", in which he pictured the damned in hell. Then he preached on

²E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 310.

"Purgatory", in which he pictured to them their parents and relatives wailing and crying, while they were having so much fun on earth. Then he would, in the third sermon on "Heaven", contrast the joyful lot of those in heaven with the sad and suffering lot of those in hell. There was even a table of charges prepared for those who came:

Kings, Archbishops and bishops...	25 gulden, or	\$335.00
Counts.....	10 gulden, or	\$134.00
Businessmen.....	3 to 6 gulden, or	
	\$40.20 to	\$80.40
Guild members.....	1 gulden, or	\$13.40
Poor.....	$\frac{1}{2}$ gulden, or	\$6.70
Destitute.....	Free of charge	3

Others had criticized indulgences before Luther: Peter Abelard, John Wycliffe, John Wesel, Pedro Martinez, Jean Laillier, and others. Before October 31, 1517, Luther had spoken on indulgences. In his classroom lectures he spoke against the abuses and evils. He spoke of justification by faith. Then on All Saint's Day, November 1, 1516, Luther spoke on indulgences. On All Saint's Day all the relics in the Castle Church would be shown and people from far and wide came to pray before these relics and earn indulgences. He argued that indulgences were nothing more than the remission of the penalties the priests imposed. He was afraid that true repentance was being shoved aside and, more than that, the real penitent should long for punishment, rather than evade it. Then in a sermon on February 24, 1517, Luther

³Ibid., p. 311.

complains that sin was being taken too lightly and that they seemed to have little fear of punishment. He also mentions that indulgences are rightly named, since they gave people a right to indulge in sin. Because of this, they never really get to find Christ. Luther is striking more and more at the core. He is afraid of indulgences because of the dangerous effect they have on the soul.

When Tetzel came to Justerbock and Zerbst, the people ran like mad to buy the indulgence letters. Tetzel could not enter Wittenberg, because Elector Frederick would not permit him. When these returned and threw the indulgence letter before Luther during confession, he became quite perturbed. Then, after Tetzel had left the territory, Luther obtained a copy of Albert's instructions to the salesmen. When Luther saw these, he felt that he could no longer keep silent. He wanted a clarification of indulgences.

Accordingly, on the day before All Saint's Day, October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, in his middle thirties, along with Johann Schneider, walk to the door of the Castle Church. There he posts on the doors the "Ninety-Five Theses." These are intended as a challenge for disputation. This was not unusual to post anything to that door, since it was the common method for announcing public and university events. He posted these to clarify the whole position on indulgences. He did not intend to revolt. So the Theses, written in Latin, were posted on the door of the Castle Church, where

they could be read by the many crowds coming to get indulgences from viewing and praying to the relics in All Saints' Church.

Perhaps there was nothing startling in the introduction:

Out of love and zeal for the elucidation of truth the following theses will be debated at Wittenberg, the Reverend Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology, presiding. He begs that those who cannot be present at the oral discussion will communicate their views in writing. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.⁴

Thus Luther himself declares that he was doing this out of love and zeal for the truth. He was perfectly honest. That this was for no political purpose, can further be shown from the fact that he sent a copy the same day to Albert of Mainz. Though they were sincere, yet we see that it would have a grave effect on the indulgence traffic. Let us briefly examine these Theses. Theses 1-7 form the introduction with a definition of indulgences. Luther strikes immediately in the first thesis when he says that Jesus commands one to repent and that the whole life of the believers should be penitence. Thus true repentance is an inward process for the whole life of a Christian and includes mortifications of the flesh. Then Luther continues by saying that the pope can remit only such penalties which he has imposed by his own authority or that of the canons. However, guilt he cannot remit. Only God can do that.

⁴Ibid., p. 315.

Theses 8-40 treat of indulgences for the dead and for the living. He stresses that the priests are wrong who reserve penances for purgatory, since they are dead to the cannon laws and relieved from them. Nor can the pope give remission of punishment for the souls in purgatory. The soul does not fly out of purgatory when money is thrown into the chest. Concerning indulgences for the living, those who say that the letters of pardon make one sure of salvation and thus make one reconciled to God, will be damned. They preach wrong who say that contrition is not necessary; and every Christian who is sorry has full remission of pain and guilt.

In Theses 41-52 Luther says that indulgences must never take the place of good works, of works of mercy. One who gives to the poor does better than if he buys indulgences. If someone buys an indulgence rather than help one in need, he draws upon himself the wrath of God. Indulgences are useful if one does not put their trust in them.

In Theses 53-80 the preaching of indulgences is compared with the preaching of the Gospel. It is wrong when in a sermon as much time is spent on indulgences as on the Word. The mind of the pope must be that if indulgences are celebrated with single bells, the Gospel should be preached with a hundred bells. The true treasure of the Church is the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God. Indulgences cannot even compare with the grace of God and the Cross.

To say that Peter could grant greater graces, or to set the insignia of the papal arms of equal power with the Cross of Christ, is blasphemous.

In Theses 81-91 Luther speaks of the questions of the laity. Why does not the pope out of love empty purgatory? Why do funeral and anniversary masses continue for the redeemed? Why not release a man from purgatory, rather than to let an enemy of God redeem a soul? Why does not the pope with his wealth build St. Peter's with his own money? Since the pope is interested in souls, rather than money, why does he suspend the letters and indulgences granted long ago? Yea, if indulgences were preached as the pope would have it, all doubts would be resolved.

In the concluding four theses, 92-95, Luther again points out that Christians should strive to follow Christ through pain, death and hell. He does not rely on the security of peace, of indulgences, but rather enters heaven through much tribulation.

Contrary to his intention, these Theses spread throughout all of Germany. If it had not been for the invention of the printing press this would not have been possible. But through this press copies were made and remade. It spread as though on wings of an angel, probably not within fourteen days as is often said, but within a very short time.

The Theses were published for an invitation to discussion. They were not meant to be an attack on the papacy.

Nor do they represent the views of the maturer Reformer, though they already have an evangelical spirit. It is so because the views were based on a searching of God's Word. Luther, in making religion more spiritual and personal, brought a return to the Christianity of the early centuries. Luther also soon learned that these mistakes and abuses were not only such of erring individuals, but were the teachings of the Church itself. Once he saw that truth, coupled with the teachings of Scripture, Luther did not yield until the victory was won. It resulted in a break with Rome. He dared to challenge the Church and said that both the Papacy and the General Council could err. At first Luther is timid, but by 1521 he is so firm in his belief, he is willing to stand up against anyone. However, these Theses are usually regarded as the real starting point of the Reformation, and thus a return to "the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone."⁵

⁵Ephesians 2:20.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Emma H. Martin Luther. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1891.
- Bainton, Roland H. Here I Stand. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950.
- Bayne, Peter. Martin Luther: His Life and Work. 2 vols. London: Cassell, 1887.
- Boehmer, Heinrich. Road to Reformation. Translated from the German by John W. Doberstein and Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946.
- Buchheimer, L. and various Lutheran authors. Great Leaders and Great Events. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. n. d. Pp. 147-169.
- Cubitt, George. The Life of Martin Luther. New York: Carlton & Lanahan, n. d.
- Dallmann, William. Martin Luther, His Life and His Labor. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917.
- , "A Catholic on Luther." Excerpts from Joseph Clayton's "Luther and His Work". The American Lutheran. XXVIII, Number 11, November 1945.
- Dau, W. H. T. Luther Examined and Reexamined. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917.
- , And Various Lutheran Writers. Four Hundred Years. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1916.
- D'Aubigne, Merle. History of the Reformation. Translated by H. White. I. New York: American Tract Society, n. d.
- , The Life and Times of Martin Luther. Chicago: Moody Press, 1950.
- Fabvre, Lucian. Martin Luther: A Destiny. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1929.
- Fife, Robert H. Young Luther. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1928.

- Freytag, Gustav. Martin Luther. Translated by Henry O. Heinemann. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1897.
- Grimm, Harold J. Martin Luther as a Preacher. Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1929.
- Grisar, Hartmann. Martin Luther. His Life and Work. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1950.
- Hastings, James. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. VIII. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916. Pp. 198-202.
- Hazlitt, William. The Table-Talk of Martin Luther. Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, n. d.
- Jacobs, Henry Eyester. Martin Luther. The Hero of the Reformation. New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1900.
- Just, Gustav. Life of Luther. Translated from the German by S. and H. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1903.
- Köstlin, Julius. Life of Luther. Translated from the German. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884.
- The Theology of Luther. Translated from the second German Edition by Charles Hay. I. Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897.
- Kramm, H. H. The Theology of Martin Luther. London: James Clark & So., LTD., 1947.
- Krauth, Charles P. The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology. Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1871.
- Kuiper, Barend K. Martin Luther. The Formative Years. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1943.
- Lenski, Gerhard. Stirring Scenes From the Life of Martin Luther. Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935.
- MaCaulay, Dr. Luther Anecdotes: Memorable Sayings and Doings of Martin Luther. London: The Religious Tract Society, n. d.

- Mayhew, Henry. Boyhood of Martin Luther. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, n. d.
- McGiffert, Arthur C. Martin Luther. The Man and His Work. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1941.
- Meurer, Moritz. Luthers Leben. Leipzig, 1878.
- Miller, Albert and Elfrieda Miller. Martin Luther in Story and Picture. Oak Park, Illinois: Miller Publishing Co., 1933.
- Nuelsen, John L. Luther: The Leader. Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1906.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. From Luther to Kierkegaard. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950.
- Plass, Ewald M. This is Luther. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948.
- Preus, Herman A. The Communion of Saints. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1948.
- Qualben, Lars P. A History of the Christian Church. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1940.
- Reu, M. Dr. Martin Luthers Leben. Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1917.
- Schwiebert, E. G. Luther and His Times. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950.
- Singmaster, Elsie. Martin Luther. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917.
- Smith, Preserved. The Life and Letters of Martin Luther. London: John Murray, 1911.
- Spitz, Lewis W. "Luther's Concept of The Atonement Before 1517." Concordia Theological Monthly, XIX Number 6 (March, 1950).
- Stolee, Ingeborg. Luther's Life. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943.
- The Catholic Encyclopedia. IX. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. Pp. 438-457.
- Weidenschilling, J. M. Living With Luther. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945.