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## A Defense of Luther against Edgar A. Mowrer

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The situation regarding translations of the Bible or of any of its parts into German became rather precarious after 1369, for it was in that year that Charles IV issued his edict against books on the Holy Scriptures in the German tongue: . . . *praesertim cum Laycis utriusque sexus secundum canonicas sanctiones etiam libris vulgaribus quibuscunque de sacra scriptura uti non liceat, ne per male intellecta deducantur in haeresin vel errorem* (especially since it is not permitted to laymen of either sex, according to the canonical sanctions, to use any books on the Sacred Scripture in the common tongue, lest by an evil understanding they be seduced into heresy and error). This edict was actually enforced by the Inquisition. Nevertheless copies of many parts of Scripture and of the whole Bible were made and distributed, as we shall see also in the next chapter.

P. E. KRETZMANN.

## A Defense of Luther against Edgar A. Mowrer.

Adolf Hitler's rise and his seizure of autocratic power, the "most portentous phenomenon of the Western World," was recently described to the American public by the correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News*, Edgar A. Mowrer, in his book *Germany Puts the Clock Back*. Just at the time it appeared in print, Mowrer was awarded the Pulitzer prize by the trustees of the Columbia University in recognition of his services as newspaper correspondent. By the *Nation* he was adjudged one of the men who outstandingly contributed to American public affairs in 1933, "the foremost to combat Hitlerism." In his book as well as in his articles Mowrer writes interestingly; he was in close contact with the events he describes, he has a fine faculty for unearthing news and evaluating it, a keen insight into European affairs, a splendid sense of proportion, and the saving grace of humor; his book may well serve as an introduction to Hitler. Its review also is important to us because it is to many people the source of information about things in Germany. Hitler thought it important, too. Mowrer was invited to leave Berlin, although he was the outstanding foreign correspondent in Germany. He was transferred to Tokyo.

Mowrer does not write very much about the relation of Hitlerism to Church and religion; still he does permit himself a digression on Luther, which is one of the most unfounded and bitter attacks on the Reformer that has come to my attention. It is such a gross misrepresentation of historical truth that it brought doubts into my mind as to the reliability of Mowrer in other matters. Let me quote the passage from page 201 and the following:—

"Protestantism means in Germany Lutheranism. All the pet doctrines of Prussianism are found in the writings of the founder,



Doctor Martin Luther. For him autocracy lay in God's plan; civil and religious authority, he wrote, should be mixed together in one hand as 'in a cake.' Therefore in each Protestant German state before the revolution the ruling prince was also the *summus episcopus*, the highest bishop. The unity of the Church lay not in its doctrine, but in the local dynasty. A prince 'by God's grace' had not only a right to rule, but he could rule relentlessly. "The ass wants blows and the rabble to be ruled by violence; therefore God did not place a fox's tail in the hands of autocracy, but a sword." The Lutheran Church came to exist primarily in and through the state."

Each and every one of these assertions is wrong.

### I.

"Protestantism means in Germany Lutheranism." No! At the celebration of the three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, in the year 1817, Friedrich Wilhelm III issued an order for the union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches. The syncretism that Luther had always rejected, for instance, at Marburg, the union between the Reformed and the Lutheran Church, was herewith officially introduced. Unmixed Lutheranism was officially abolished in Prussia and in most of the other German states. But even in those provinces which retained the name Lutheran the fundamental teachings of Luther and of the Lutheran Confessions were rejected in the course of the last century.

The newly appointed professor of church history in Erlangen, Licentiat Sasse, wrote in the *Theologische Blaetter* a few months ago: "If German Lutheranism has to make an accusation, it must make it against itself. Four hundred years it carried the fetters of the State Church and conceded a power to the state that according to the teachings of our Confessions does not belong to it. Two hundred years it suffered a theology that had to falsify the message of the Reformation. What knowledge did we retain of the article of justification, the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*? What had become of the Sacraments?" (*Freikirche*, 1933, p. 164.)

Our own Missouri Synod here in America, which stands without reservation on the doctrinal position of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, has continually lifted up its voice against the apostasy from the Lutheran doctrine on the part of the State Church in Germany. Our founders, in 1838, emigrated from the fatherland for this very reason; they had no fellowship with members of the State Church. They have supported the *Freikirche* as a protest against the dominant *pseudo*-Lutheranism; they have shown by quotations from the writings of prominent Lutheran theologians that these theologians were anything but Lutheran.

I cannot here insert a catalog of these quotations, but merely translate a few lines from Adolf Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christen-*



tums, a book that is representative of German theology of our age. Harnack writes: "Not the Son, but only the Father belongs into the Gospel as Jesus has preached it" (p. 92, 2d ed.); and again: "The phrase 'I am the Son' has not been inserted into His Gospel by Jesus Himself, and whoever places it therein as a truth besides others adds something to the Gospel" (*ib.*, p. 92). Nothing could be a more categorical denial of Luther's teachings than this is.

Thus we must change Mowrer's line "Protestantism means in Germany Lutheranism" to "Protestantism in Germany has cast away the name and the essential doctrines of Lutheranism."

## II, 1.

"All the pet doctrines of Prussianism are found in the writings of the founder, Doctor Martin Luther," is the next thesis of our writer. He lists six of these; the first is: "Autocracy lay in God's plan." Mowrer makes the almost unbelievable error of using in his translation the word *autocracy* wherever Luther employs the word *Obrigkeit*; for instance, in the quotation taken from Luther's *Sendbrief von dem harten Buechlein wider die Bauern*. I had the opportunity of discussing this point with Mr. Mowrer when he was debating in November with a defender of Hitler, Prof. Friederich Schoenemann of Berlin, before the Foreign Policy Club in our city. He maintained that *Obrigkeit* was not the general term equivalent for government, that one could, for instance, not speak of the *Obrigkeit* of a city!

J. and W. Grimm, in their *Deutsches Woerterbuch*, Vol. 7, under the word *Obrigkeit*, define it. First, "*Oberherrlichkeit, die obrigkeitliche, herrschaftliche Gewalt*"; secondly, "*die oberste Regierung oder eine von derselben eingesetzte Behoerde*." Grimm quotes Luther about six times for each of these uses. Then he has this quotation from Goethe: "*Die Obrigkeit Heilbronnns besteht aus lauter Protestanten und Studierten*"; and from Freytag, *Die Obrigkeit der Staedte*. Besides Grimm I have compared ten standard German dictionaries and foremost authorities, Heyne, Adelung, Weigand, Kaltschmidt, Bergmann, Brandt, Paul, Hoffmann, Wessely, Heath. Not a single one gives "autocracy" as a meaning for *Obrigkeit*, or *Oberkeit*, as Luther writes it. To establish Luther's use of the word, one may also compare his translation of the Bible. Thus in the New Testament the word occurs fourteen times, twelve times to translate the word *exousia*, twice for *arche*, never for *tyrannis*.

So much for the meaning of the word. What are the facts? Luther knew the different forms of government; he cites Aristotle; but he never criticizes democracy, nor does he express his preference for monarchy, much less for autocracy. He praises the government of the free cities of the realm unstintingly, again and again. Thus he says of Nuernberg: "Nuernberg has the best and cleverest people



in the council"; "Nuernberg is a rich, *well-governed* city, in which there is good government." It was a city without an autocrat.

Luther did say — and teach *in extenso* — that government in the abstract is an estate, is an institution in accordance with God's plan. He teaches to a world that is chafing the bit the eternal truths expressed by St. Peter (1 Pet. 2, 1), that we are to submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake or by St. Paul (Rom. 13, 1—5), that all authority (*Obrigkeit*) is of God, that civil magistrates are ordained by God, that obedience to them must be rendered as a part of our obedience to God. "This principle runs through the Bible" (Hodge, *Systematic Theol.*, III, 338); it was now presented with new emphasis to the world; whether it referred to the Elector of Saxony or to the *Rat* of Nuernberg, an autocracy or a republic, President Roosevelt can take as much comfort from Luther's writings as Kaiser Wilhelm did.

## II, 2.

The next accusation of Mr. Mowrer is that Luther wrote that civil and religious authority should be mixed together in one hand as "in a cake." Mowrer does not give his source. I checked the indices of Luther's writings and read many a page, but could not find that quotation or one similar as to content. I even consulted Roman-Catholic writers in vain. At the time I met Mr. Mowrer, he promised to send me his reference, but up to the present time he has not done so. As a matter of fact this idea is in plain contradiction to Luther's oft-expressed standpoint. Civil and religious government *must not be mixed*, is Luther's constant cry. The separation of civil and religious authority was one of the Reformation's greatest boons to mankind; Christ's divine command that we should give unto God the things that are God's and unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's had been buried under the papocaesarism of Rome. The entire world was under the curse of the bull *Unam Sanctam* of Boniface VIII: "When the apostle said, 'Behold, here are two swords,' that is, in the Church, since it was the apostles who spoke, the Lord did not reply, 'It is too much,' but, 'It is enough.' Truly, he who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of St. Peter misunderstands the words of the Lord. . . . The one sword, then, should be under the other and *temporal authority subject to spiritual power.*" (Laffan, *Documents*, p. 117.)

And not one of the humanists, not one of the Swiss reformers cast upon the world the divine light of the real relation between Church and State as clearly as Luther did. In the beginning of the Reformation Luther wrote several tracts that will ever remain a real contribution to the world literature on political economy. And there is one point that he emphasizes in his tracts, in his sermons, in his exegesis, and that is that the two powers must not be mixed. Of the



countless passages I shall quote one or two. In his Christmas sermon of 1532, *apropos* of the name Augustus: "It is a great task to make a clean-cut distinction of the two kingdoms; for there are few who hit upon this truly. Usually it happens that the civil masters want to rule in the Church, and, on the other hand, the ecclesiastics want their say in the court-house. Under Popedom it was called well governed, and is still called so, *when both are mixed together; but that is governing very badly.*" (Erl., 1, 255.)

Writing in 1535 against the aggrandizement of power on the part of the consistories, Luther wrote: "Satan continues to be the adversary. Under Popedom he mixed the Church under civil government; in our time he wants to mix civil government under the Church. But we are opposed to it with God's help and endeavor with all our might *to keep the two provinces apart.*" (W. XXI, 1325.) Note that these two quotations are from his later writings.

Neither do the official confessions of the Lutheran Church mix this poisonous cake. Augsburg Confession, Art. 28: "Civil government is concerned with altogether different things than the Gospel; it does not protect souls, but body and property against force; it does that with the sword and punishment. Therefore these two governments, the spiritual and the civil, *should not be mixed together.*" The Apology (§ 54) says: "This entire chapter of doctrine in regard to the *distinction* of the kingdom of Christ and civil kingdom is declared *in the writings of our men in a useful way.*"

## II, 3.

From the above it is clear without further argument that Mowrer's next thesis is also wrong: "*Therefore* in each Protestant German state before the revolution the ruling prince was also the *summus episcopus*, the highest bishop."

It is, however, necessary to state the historical problem here involved. How did it come about that the Church, having been freed from the bondage of the papal rule, did not develop a church organization in which *the rights of the local congregation and self-government* were definitely established. Luther stressed the sovereignty of the individual believer in Christ, showing from 1 Pet. 2, 9: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood," and from Rev. 1, 6: "He hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father," the spiritual priesthood and proclaiming with a clarion voice the sovereignty of each Christian, in whom are vested all spiritual and ecclesiastical rights and authority—the right to call and depose the servant of the Word and the right to judge all doctrine. This Luther does already in the great tract of 1520, *To the Christian Nobility*, of which Koestlin (1, 354) says: "In general he establishes ideas and aims with which he anticipates the problems of centuries: thus in



church matters in letting the organization of the church be founded on the priesthood rights of all Christians and on an office emanating therefrom, the essentials of which would not be a government like a civil one, but a *spiritual service of Word and Sacrament.*"

The task that confronted Luther in forming a church organization was enormous. As the entire world was without a conception of religious rights, it had been weaned of it through more than a millennium. When the spiritual serfdom was broken, the very foundations upon which the society was resting were destroyed. The laity had not the faintest idea of self-government, in religious groups as little as in civil. Besides this, in the reorganization of church government the question of church property had to be considered. Should those who severed their connection from Rome take it upon themselves to appropriate the convents, churches, and other properties? Luther himself could and would not become the autocrat of the new Church, while the mass of the people was as little fitted for ecclesiastical self-government as the Filipinos were thought prepared for civil independence by the Congress of the United States.

An idea of the state of affairs can be gained from a study of the peasant uprisings. But even here when the peasants presented their twelve articles and the first read: "The entire congregation should have the power to elect and depose a preacher," Luther wrote: "This article is right." (Erl., 24, 280.) Other occasions brought out his approval of the same principle of church government. When Luther let *civil magistrates take the lead* in the organization of the new Church, he always demanded that they keep apart their rights as citizens and as Christians. For instance, in 1528 and again in 1538, in editing the *Instructions for the Visitors in Saxony*, the commission for church inspection and reform appointed by the Elector Johann, he said in the introduction: "Since no one of us is called and has a command to do it, . . . no one dared to take it upon himself before another. Therefore we approached the Elector Johann that His Grace the Elector out of Christian charity (for as civil government they are not obligated) and for God's sake . . . would call and appoint proper persons to such office; . . . for although His Grace the Elector have not been commanded to teach and to rule in spiritual affairs, nevertheless they are in duty bound not to let dissensions, riots, and revolts arise between subjects." (Erl., 26, 6 f.) With him the princes are "*Notbischoefe*," emergency bishops, pinch-hitters. In the entire second part of his tract on government, 1523 (Erl., 22, 57-105), he expands the thesis that magistrates have no right to rule over the conscience or religion of their subjects.

Dr. Walther presented Luther's standpoint several times, most fully in his synodical paper before the Western District in 1885. In recent years Luther's actions have been reexamined by Lord Acton



and by his collaborator A. F. Pollard in the *Cambridge Modern History*, second volume. This is liberally drawn upon by S. Parkes Cadman, *Christianity and State*, 1923 (Macmillan). They all criticize Luther for permitting the civil authorities to become too great a factor in church government and show their Reformed slant by setting up Zwingli and Calvin as models, overlooking their false principles in regard to separation of Church and State and forgetting the uninterrupted misalliance between State and Church in England since their days and those of their scholar and follower John Knox.

Among recent German discussions of our problem may be mentioned that of Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen*, 1923, Tuebingen. He is a *jurisconsultus* and is much more objective than the others mentioned. I quote from page 453: "In the time of fermentation and the variegated endeavors at reform, Luther without reserve permitted the communities to create their own new systems of law and gave them his blessings. When this failed and the peasant uprising brought about dangerous abuses of these reforms, he asked for a general reorganization on the part of the state; and here Luther had to suffer, and occasionally to support, in the new state churches, instead of the Word, the help of human jurisprudence." The outstanding history published in Germany of late is the *Propylaeen-Weltgeschichte*, Berlin. In its fifth volume, *Reformation und Gegenreformation*, 1930, Paul Joachimsen, Munich, treats our question at great length and sums it up thus (p. 214): "Every presentation of the Reformation that does not take it as an exclusively theological one cuts loose in a peculiar way from the person of Luther, the farther, the more. . . . Whatever of positive organizations had its origin in the Reformation, that Luther permitted rather than created. This holds true also of the most important creation connected with Luther, that of the Evangelical Church itself. That this Church became a Church of the Word and confession, that according to its conception it should be a people's, a congregational, church, that is the work of Luther. The growth to a territorial, to a governmental Church at all, he merely permitted, and he did not indulge in any uncertain hopes as to the results. "They want to be in the Church and also rule over the consciences," he says of the magistrates; "that we will not permit." But he had to permit it nevertheless, and the twofold consequences, that the servants of the Word at the same time became servants of the princes and that the Christian education towards the Gospel that was to begin now became a part of the behavior code of the 'Christian' police state, this Luther noticed already on his own person." This is a correct historical analysis (on the part of a non-Missourian) and can be proved in detail.



## II, 4.

Mowrer's next accusation, that Luther did not stress unity in doctrine, has never before been raised against him. The cry always has been that he was too exclusive, where unity of doctrine was concerned. His opponents have not ceased to criticize him for refusing fellowship to Zwingli and his followers as long as they would not fully agree as to the Sacrament. To learn how conscientious Luther was before receiving any one into church-fellowship and how he insisted on unity of faith, one ought to read the transactions of the Wittenberg Concord in the year 1536, an agreement that was rejected by Zurich. Frankfurt was also concerned in the Concord. Luther wrote at that time to those of Frankfurt: "Therefore this is my honest advice. . . . If any one knows that his minister teaches Zwinglian, he should shun him and rather be without Sacrament all his lifetime." This spirit of Luther showed itself in the Lutheran Church when in 1577 and 1578 3 electors, 20 princes, 24 counts, 4 barons, 29 cities of the realm, and 8,000 ministers of the Gospel subscribed to the entire Formula of Concord, all of their own free will, after due consideration; and many more joined in the following years, a case of doctrinal unity that stands unparalleled in the history of the world.

## II, 5.

The phrase "by the grace of God" has been in use for over a thousand years. It is based on New Testament passages; perhaps the Orient theory of the divine origin of kings as it was applied to Roman emperor worship, especially since the time of Augustus, had something to do with its introduction; it was applied to the emperors of the Holy Roman realm, to other magistrates, and to church dignitaries. When Pope Leo III placed the crown on the head of Charles the Great, Christmas 800, he said, "To Charles the Great, crowned of God, Great and Pacific Emperor of the Romans" (Laffan, *Documents*, p. 6); Robert Guiscard took the following oath at Melfi, 1057: "I, Robert, by the grace of God," etc. (*ibid.*, p. 25). Then we find the document of 1156: "Adrian, by the grace of God Supreme Pontiff"; and of 1230, Eberhard, Siegfried, Leopold, Bernhard, Otto, "by God's grace princes of the empire" (*ib.*); and of 1495, "James be [*sic*] the grace of God king of the Scottis." (*Oxford Dictionary*, s. t. *grace*.) Also to English kings and queens was it applied; you may to-day pick up a penny in Canada with the legend "Victoria, Dei Gratia Regina, 1900." Do we hold Luther responsible for all of this?

## II, 6.

In Louis XIV, King of France, absolutism and despotism reached its highest pinnacle, and "by the grace of God" was abused to shield the heresy that the state existed for the ruler and not for the benefit of the subjects; in that way a servile nobility supported this



greed after power and this irresponsibility to the governed. (Walter Goetz, *Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus*, Berlin, 1931, p. 23.) This germ of absolutism wrought havoc in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and infested other European courts; and if we diagnose such a germ cultured by the Hohenzollerns, it is unhistorical to make Luther responsible for it. In accordance with the New Testament he looked upon governmental authority as being the same divine ordinance as parental authority, not more, not less divine. The most rabid liberal must concede to the government the right to rule, and to rule efficiently; that is inherent in the definition of government.

No one can bring proof that Luther wanted the government to rule arbitrarily and tyrannically; but he did advocate ruling firmly when the public weal demanded it. He used his most forceful expressions in connection with the peasant revolt, one of which is quoted by Mowrer, with the wrong translation of *Obrigkeit*. What is our Federal Government and what are the States doing during the present kidnaping wave? Does France in these February days of 1934 let the police and military power wave a fox's tail, or does it point machine guns on the Place de la Concord at the rioters anent the fall of the Daladier ministry? Luther was in the very center of unrest; the peasants were revolting from the Rhine to Salzburg in all of Southern Germany, especially in Saxony. They were in many instances defending their movement by Luther's teaching. He had queer experiences a short time before in meeting followers of the iconoclast Carlstadt in and near Orlamuende. When the revolt now swept on like a wild-fire, he remonstrated by writing against the revolters and also appeared in person at the focal points of the disturbance midst jeers of the mobs and at the risk of his life. When incendiarism and riotings spread,—the *Catholic Encyclopedia* estimates that 1,000 convents were fired,—when the flames of the castles turned the darkness of night into day, he wrote those words that God had given the *Obrigkeit* not a fox's tail, but the sword. He had previously not minced words in rebuking the magistrates for their practises and told them that the uprising was God's punishment for their wrong-doing.

The very rulers to whom Luther addressed himself, Philip of Hesse and the Elector Johann, distinguished themselves by restraint; the Bishop of Wuerzburg and other Catholic rulers who would ignore Luther are notorious for acts of cruelty. (Koestlin, 749.) One hundred thousand are said to have lost their lives in battle and by execution. Had Luther sided with the revolters, his entire influence would have been wiped out, and there would have been no Reformation; that is the judgment of friend and foe.

I shall close this article with two short quotations from Luther's works, one written during the revolt and the other immediately after



the collapse: "The masters and governments I ask for two things; first, in case they win, that they be not proud in consequence of it, but fear God, before whom they are very guilty; secondly, that they show clemency to the prisoners and those who surrender." (*Letter to Counts of Mansfeld*, after Muenzer's debacle. Erl., 65, 22.) A few pages after the very words quoted by Mowrer: "And again and for the third time I say that I have addressed only the government that wishes to be Christian or otherwise get along honestly, that I might advise their conscience in such a case, namely, that it should quickly strike in the mob of the revolters. . . . But afterward, when they have succeeded, that they *show mercy*, not only to the innocent, as they are already doing, but also to the *guilty ones*." (Erl., 24, 318.) They should be relentless, not relentless.

St. Paul, Minn.

THEO. BUENGER.

### Predigtstudie über 2 Tim. 2, 8—13.

(Für den Sonntag Cantate. Eisenacher Epistelreihe.)

Paulus lag im Gefängnis, seinen sicheren Tod erwartend, 2 Tim. 4, 6. Aber selbst im Gefängnis dreht sich all sein Denken, all sein Sehnen, um Jesum und sein Evangelium. Der Inhalt seiner freudigen Nüchternheiten ist die Tatsache, daß es in dieser Welt Leute gibt, die im Glauben an Jesum stehen, selige Himmelsbürger sind, 1, 3—5. 16—18; 2, 19 usw. Was ihn schmerzt, ist die traurige Erfahrung, daß so viele Jesum nicht annehmen wollen oder ihm nicht Treue halten, 1, 15; 2, 16—18; 4, 3. 10. 16. Und was es ihm ermöglicht, bei allen trüben Erfahrungen, die er gemacht hat, bei allen Trübsalen, die er erduldet, ja selbst bei dem Gedanken an seinen bevorstehenden Tod dennoch ruhig, getrost, zuversichtlich, freudig zu bleiben, ist Jesus, 1, 8—12; 4, 8. 18. Nun bittet er seinen Timotheus, weiter zu predigen, was er von seinem Lehrer gehört hat, 1, 6—8; 2, 1, ja auch andere zu solchem Amt und Werk auszurüsten, damit diese wiederum andere lehren, 2, 2, so daß das Evangelium von einer Generation bis zur andern weiter gereicht, weiter gepredigt werde. In dem Abschnitt, der uns vorliegt, zeigt Paulus, welche hohe Ursache Timotheus habe zu rechter, freudiger Standhaftigkeit im Bekenntnis des Evangeliums, zu unerschrockenem Zeugenmut. Die Worte sind also zunächst an Timotheus gerichtet, gelten aber jedem Prediger, ja sie enthalten wichtige Lehren für alle Christen.

„Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christum, der auferstanden ist von den Toten, aus dem Samen Davids, nach meinem Evangelium!“ W. 8. Halt im Gedächtnis! So hat Luther trefflich das Wort *μνημόνευε* übersetzt. Dieses Wort heißt, sonderlich wenn es mit dem Akkusativ konstruiert wird, eine Sache oder Person in der Erinnerung behalten, sich nicht nur das eine oder andere Mal an sie erinnern, sondern sie