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The Blast that Wrecked the Pope's Power.

Some years ago a writer in the *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY* (I, 571—581) pointed out that the dynamic of Luther's Reformation was his clear and powerful preaching of justification by faith alone. By his own experience Luther, by the grace of God, had recognized that the *sola fide* alone can give positive assurance to the sinner of God's pardon and his own eternal salvation; what he had found he taught and preached to others who were seeking certainty for the eternity beyond the grave and failed to find it in the work-righteousness of the papal teaching; and so Luther became the Reformer of the Church. To this day the *sola fide* is the distinguished mark of the Church of the Reformation.

There remains, however, a question. The student of Reformation history must be struck by the evident helplessness of Pope and hierarchy against Luther. There is much talk, but little action. How was it that Luther escaped the fate of John Huss, of Girolamo Savonarola, of John Wyclif, whom only an early death saved from the same end, execution at the hand of Rome? How did the reforming movement of Luther escape the fate of previous efforts, so that the results have become permanent?

Various explanations are advanced. No one has the hardihood to suggest a lack of will on the part of the curia; there is no indication of repentance for past ill deeds and desire to deal justly with this Reformer. But one advances the political situation; his desire to influence the election of a new emperor and later on to curb the power of the emperor bound the Pope's hands and made it inexpedient to antagonize the Elector of Saxony. But the Pope had formerly found ways and means to bring even emperors and kings to terms; think of Gregory VII and Henry IV, of Innocent III and John Lackland; even Boniface VIII was victorious in the end, though he did not live to see it; his Bull *Unam Sanctam* was indeed recalled by Clement VI; the three great Reform Councils went on record maintaining that the council is superior to the Pope and then failed utterly and absolutely in enforcing that principle; the Vatican Council of 1512—1517 was evidently no more than the rubber stamp of the curia; Leo X's bull *Pastor Aeternus*, reinstating the *Unam Sanctum*, was ratified. — Others speak of extortion practised by the priesthood, of other abuses which were exceeding all previous records; but while great depravity in the Church is admitted by all, it is not so certain that conditions were much worse than ever before; and even if they were, such situations had been changed before, and the danger of a reduction of papal power had been averted. — It is claimed that the increasing enlightenment of the people reduced their fear of the papal power and so curbed the effectiveness of the Pope's influence; historical research, above all, had sadly undermined the prestige of

the Papacy. But there had been previous Renaissance movements, which had been wiped out effectively when they interfered with papal prerogatives, so that we may be emboldened to say: It is due to Luther's Reformation that this Renaissance movement was permanent, not *vice versa*. And since the days of Dante and Marsilius of Padua scholars knew that there had been a time when there was no Pope; and fifty years before Luther Lorenzo Valla had proved that the Pope's claim to temporal power rested on forged documents. It is not denied that all these reasons contributed their part to Luther's success; but none of them nor all of them are sufficient. There must be something else. Belloc, the mouthpiece of English Catholics, suggests (*How the Reformation Happened*): Action against Luther was delayed until it was too late because the Church was thoroughly corrupt and knew it was so; hence the gears jammed. But why should that cause the gears to jam? Even though guilt was admitted, — which I do not find, — there is not the least indication of repentance, as Belloc himself acknowledges (*l. c.*). Nor were the gears rusty from disuse: The Dominican inquisition was restlessly active; not a year passed without victims. Will and intention was not lacking, as noted; as a matter of fact, the machinery was set in motion against Luther at once; within nine months after the posting of the Ninety-five Theses Luther was formally and officially accused of heresy by the constituted authorities of the Church and cited to appear before the papal court.

Why was he not forced to go? It is evident that the Pope lacked the power to carry out his threat, a power which he had possessed and exercised up to this time; what made that power fail in Luther's case? — The ultimate reason, of course, is God's will; that is the ultimate reason for everything that happens in history. But our God, as a rule, works through natural means; and it is the church historian's business to try to find and point out the means by which God accomplishes His desired purpose. What had happened at this time to jam the gears, to paralyze the power of the Pope?

The entire power of the hierarchy rested on one claim; Dr. Walther, in a sermon for Reformation Day, states it thus (*Brosamen*, 70, 594 f.): "Durch das Papsttum wurde die Kirche in einen Priesterstaat verwandelt, in welchem der roemische Bischof mit seinem unermesslichen Heer von Bischoefen, Priestern und Moenchen die ganze Christenheit als ihr unumschraenkter Gebieter beherrschte, Papst, Bischof und Priester zu befehlen, der Laie nur zu gehorchen, *der Priester die Gewalt der Himmelsschlüssel als sein ausschliessliches Privilegium zu verwalten und der Laie die Seligkeit als eine Gnade der Geistlichkeit zu erwarten und von ihr zu erkaufen hatte.*" In other words, the power of Pope and hierarchy did not rest on any donation of Constantine, not on any documents, forged or otherwise, but on their alleged authority to open or close heaven at will, ar-

bitrarily. Sacramentalism and Sacerdotalism are the terms commonly used to designate this principle; no salvation without the Sacraments; and the Sacraments are valid only when administered by a validly ordained priest. When a priest therefore excommunicated a man, excluded him from the use of the Sacraments, heaven was closed to that man; when, by order of the Pope, the priests ceased to function in a certain land (the interdict), heaven was closed to the people of that land. The force of this allegation lay of course not in the fact that the Church taught so, but in this, that all the world believed it. Hence the fearful, the never-failing effect of the interdict in the Middle Ages; it rested on the alleged — and conceded — power of the priest, by administration or denial of the Sacraments, to open or close heaven.

An example will again clarify this. John Lackland refused to receive Stephen Langton, whom the Pope had consecrated archbishop of Canterbury; he swore "by God's teeth," if any one dared to put his kingdom under the interdict, he would send them packing to Rome and confiscate their goods; if they were the subjects of the Pope, he would pluck out their eyes, slit their noses, and so return them to the Pope. Brave words! — Calmly, slowly, relentlessly, Rome went into action. This was in 1205. In 1208 the interdict was laid on England, in Passion-week. At midnight the bells tolled; the priests entered the churches by torchlight, burned the wafers, covered crosses and images and pictures, and hid the relics and sacred vessels. The sentence was proclaimed from the altars amid silence, broken only by gasps and tears; when all had left, the doors were closed, none knowing when they might reopen.

It is difficult, it is impossible, for us fully to put ourselves in the place of people who for generations and centuries had been trained in the belief that their salvation was bound to the Sacraments administered by their priest when suddenly all church activity ceased. From childhood on they had seen the doors opening for Mass every morning; shut doors met them now; no Sunday services; no festivals; one day like the other, one week like the other. Babies were baptized hastily and not in church (priests were always permitted to administer emergency baptism; sometimes one or the other Sacrament was permitted), and mothers wondered whether it was sufficient to save their children. Confession was refused; there was no absolution, no Communion; men walked about with sins unforgiven. The sick had no hope, the dead, even if they received the last Sacrament, were flung into unconsecrated earth; all was uncertain. Lovers were not married by the priest; if they lived together, it was an unhallowed union. It had its influence on social and commercial life. A great silence fell on the land. Trade suffered; booths were dismantled; streets were deserted; ships no longer stopped at English quays. "Men felt suddenly the power of that unknown hand in far

Rome. It reached over sea and land; the Pope, a thousand miles and more away, had but to whisper, and every tiny hamlet in England heard with trembling." (*A. T. Sheppard.*)—Five years John Lackland held out; I believe that was a record; then he yielded; 1213 he surrendered England to the Pope, to receive it back as a fief against the promise of an annual tribute of 1,000 marks.

Always, monotonously, the story is repeated. Brave words are spoken; a great show of resistance is made. Unhurriedly Rome goes into action; Rome is never in a hurry; what it does not get this year, it will get next year or the next decade or the next century. Under steady, relentless pressure, sooner or later the breaking point is reached, and Rome is victorious.

Then came Dr. Eck's challenge of Carlstadt and his attack on Luther. For the Leipzig Debate Luther studied the evidence, or lack of evidence, for the primacy of the Pope. The result was laid down in Luther's *Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* and in his letter on *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Clearly and convincingly he proved that the sacramental system is a popish structure, the interdict "the devil's own invention," man's salvation not bound to the priest's activity; each one must be saved by his own acceptance, through faith, of Christ's merits. People heard and read and believed; and there fell the fear of the clergy, and therewith the power of the Papacy, of the interdict, etc.

Why did not the Pope lay the interdict on Saxony? He was too wise. Fifty years earlier it would have been successful; now it would have been a public laughing-stock. True, at Worms practically all Germany stood behind Luther. Cajetan advised making an end of Luther and his work; Carl von Miltitz knew Germany better; Belloc calls him a "diplomatic June-bug"; Catholics never tire in telling us that he drank too much; but he had his sober moments, and in such a moment he said: Not with 25,000 Swiss soldiers would he dare to take Luther through Germany to Rome. And yet—if Luther had not shattered the universal belief in Sacramentalism and Sacerdotalism, nothing in the world could have saved him from the fate of John Huss and his work from the fate of Wyclif's reform in England.

THEO. HOYER.

How will Radio-Preaching Affect the Regular Pulpit of Our Church?

Fundamentally Christian preaching is not subject to change. Its basis is the same from generation to generation: the inspired, immutable Word of God; its message dare never be anything but the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Any preaching that does not strictly adhere to these essential principles will invariably result in dechristianizing, or paganizing, the sermon.