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THE NINETY-FIVE THESES IN THEIR THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

"A poor peasant's son, then a diligent student, an humble monk, and, finally, a modest, industrious scholar, Martin Luther had already exceeded the half of the life-time allotted to him, when—certainly with the decision characteristic of him, but with all the reserve imposed by his position in life and the immediate purpose of his action—he determined to subject the religious conceptions which lay at the basis of the indulgence-usages of the time to an examination in academic debate." This singularly comprehensive and equally singularly accurate statement of Paul Kalkoff's is worth quoting because it places us at once at the right point of view for forming an estimate of the Ninety-Five Theses which Luther, in prosecution of the purpose thus intimated, posted on the door of the Castle-Church at Wittenberg on the fateful October 31, 1517. It sets clearly before us the Luther who posted the Theses. It was—as he describes himself, indeed, in their heading—Martin Luther, Master of Arts and of Theology, Ordinary Professor of Theology in the University of Wittenberg. And it indicates to us with equal clearness the nature of the document which he posted. It consists of heads for a discussion designed to elucidate the truth with respect to the subject with which it deals—as again Luther himself tells us in its heading. We have to do here in a word with an academic document, prepared by an academic teacher, primarily for an academic purpose. All that the Theses were to become grows out of this fundamental fact. We have to reckon, of course, with the manner of man this Professor of Theology was; with the conception he held of the

LUTHER AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY IN RELIGION

PART I

That the Reformation of the sixteenth century is one of the most important turning points in the history of the world is a statement whose validity is equalled only by its commonplaceness. In some sense Martin Luther, the pioneer and hero of the movement, must be deemed the prophet of a new age. He and his fellow leaders in the different lands of Europe changed the character of western civilization, sweeping away the hallowed traditions of a thousand years, and making the scenes of desolation blossom with a new life of wondrous vigor and beauty.

But as to the precise significance of the Reformation, and its specific relations to the modern era, there is only partial agreement. We are not here thinking primarily of those noted Ultramontane writers—Janssen, Pastor, Denifle, Weiss, Grisar, and the like—who by their literary skill, and especially by their ability and zeal in investigation have given a new lustre to recent Roman Catholic scholarship in the field of history, but whose interpretations of what they are pleased to regard as merely one of a series of defections from the bishop of Rome is a monstrous perversion of the facts. We are concerned, rather, with the wide divergence among Protestants themselves as to the meaning of the Reformation. Historians of the Ritschlian school quite generally have regarded Luther as having pathetically failed to fulfill the promise of his early public career, and Prof. Troeltsch, in a notable address delivered at Stuttgart in 1906, seriously proposed a new chronological division of history, by which the Middle Ages are to be extended to about 1700 A.D., and thus made to include two centuries of Protestantism.¹

¹ The Address was entitled "Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt." Cf. the translation, by W. Mont-

Specially significant, too, is the changed attitude² toward the custom, now almost a hundred years old, of representing the Reformation as the expression of two basal principles,—the so-called material principle, justification by faith alone, and the formal principle, the supreme and exclusive authority of the Scriptures in all matters of faith and conduct. Some critics of this dual formula prefer a trinity of principles, while others strive to secure a higher unity of the several elements, though at the expense, often enough, of what many Protestants will regard as essential factors.³

gomery, of the Address in expanded form, *Protestantism and Progress*, 1912; also Troeltsch, "Protestantisches Christentum und Kirche in der Neuzeit," in *Die Kultur der Gegenwart* i, Abt. iv (1906). For an incisive criticism of this unfair treatment of early Protestantism, see Fr. Loofs, *Luthers Stellung zum Mittelalter und zur Neuzeit*, Halle, 1907.

² Cf. A. Ritschl. "Über die beiden Prinzipien des Protestantismus," in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, i (1877), pp. 397 ff.; Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*⁴, p. 857, n. 1; Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, ii (1898), p. 289; C. Stange, "A Ritschls Urteil über die beiden Prinzipien des Protestantismus," in *Theolog. Studien und Kritiken*, 1897, pp. 599 ff.

³ See, e.g., Ph. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vi, p. 16, where the "three fundamental principles" are the "supremacy of the Scriptures over tradition, the supremacy of faith over works, and the supremacy of the Christian people over an exclusive priesthood,"—though in the context the three are resolved "into the one principle of evangelical freedom or freedom in Christ." Schenkel, *Das Wesen des Protestantismus*, i, § 1, "corrects" the double formula in favor of a "theological, anthropological and theanthropological principle"; but in his later work, *Die Grundlehren des Christenthums*, 1877, p. 140, he likewise speaks of one principle,—"*Freiheit des Gewissens, Geistesfreiheit überhaupt, in Gebundenheit an die Wahrheit und an die Wahrheit der Offenbarung insbesondere.*" For other attempts to reduce the essence of the Reformation to a single principle, see P. Gennrich, *Der Kampf um die Schrift*, 1898, pp. 2 ff.; Seeberg, as cited, p. 289; Th. Kolde, *Luthers Stellung zu Concil und Kirche bis 1521*, pp. vii, 21; R. W. Dale, *Protestantism: Its Ultimate Principle*, p. 77 ("The direct access of the soul to God—the direct access of God to the soul"); Lommatzsch, *Luthers Lehre vom eth. rel. Standpunkt aus*, 1879, pp. 184 ff.; Adolf Bolliger, *Das Schriftprinzip der protestantischen Kirche einst, heute, in der Zukunft*, pp. 81 ff.; and—as typical of this whole school—A. Sabatier, *Les Religions d' Autorité Et La Religion De L'Esprit* (Livre Troisième, 1904).

Nor is it strange that the Reformed Churches, following in these respects the leadership of Zwingli and Calvin themselves, gave the place of primacy and honor to the Scriptures as the source of all doctrinal truth, and substituted for justification by faith alone the larger and more fruitful idea of the sovereignty of God, in his gracious work of election and salvation no less than in creation and revelation.

But undoubtedly it is the validity and adequacy of the formal principle of the Reformation—the normative authority of holy Scripture—that are to-day most seriously challenged. On the one hand, it is maintained, that the principle itself is not peculiar to the Reformation, and that therefore it cannot have the importance that has often been given to it in popular evangelical opinion.⁴ Attention is directed to the fact that not only the Schoolmen⁵ but also the so-called “Reformers before the Reformation”⁶—Goch, Wesel and Wessel—taught the supreme authority of the Scripture as the Word of God. How far some of these champions of reform ventured to go in their attacks upon ecclesiastical traditions may be seen in Occam’s bold declaration, that while the pope can err the sacred Scripture cannot err, and that a heretical pope should be deposed.⁷

It would, however, be a great mistake to suppose that the Scripture principle was the same thing for those medieval leaders that it was for Luther and his fellow Reformers.⁸

⁴ Loofs, *Luthers Stellung, etc.*, p. 9.

⁵ J. Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie*² (1901), ii, p. 7; Seeberg, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. (4 f.) 84, 176 f.; but compare also pp. 177 ff.

⁶ Loofs, *Leitfaden, etc.*,⁴ pp. 656 ff., Seeberg, as cited, ii, p. 194, *et passim*.

⁷ Cf. F. Kropatscheck, “Occam und Luther. Bemerkungen zur Geschichte des Autoritätsprinzips,” in *Beiträge zur Förderung christl. Theologie* (Vierter Jahrg., 1900), pp. 64 ff.; Seeberg, as cited, p. 153; and Seeberg, *Realencyklopädie f. prot. Theol. u. Kirche*,³ art. “Ockham,” pp. 272 ff.

⁸ Harnack, while careful to stress the “new” in Luther’s evangelicalism, yet regards his attitude toward the Scriptures as one of the most deplorable of the many “remnants” of Catholicism which he retained; *Lehrbuch, etc.*,⁴ iii, pp. 868, 878. According to Harnack, Luther’s views on this subject present a hopeless contradiction, because on the one

As we shall hope to show, Luther's solution of the problem of authority in religion presupposes a radically different conception of the Christian's relation to the Bible.⁹

On the other hand, granting that the formal principle is an essential characteristic of Protestantism, we find that there are still—as there ever have been—broad differences of opinion, as between conservatives and liberals, between the "orthodox" and the rationalistically inclined theologians, in regard to the grounds upon which Luther himself based the validity of the principle. The question is still being asked, and the answers are very varied—What was Luther's attitude to the Scriptures? Are his views self-consistent? Is he justly to be regarded as a forerunner of Rationalism?

From what has been said it is clear that the familiar formula concerning the two principles of the Reformation is not, from the dogmatic point of view, altogether satisfactory. Nevertheless it affords a useful method of discriminating between two elements in evangelical experience—between two phases of evangelical thought—which, though capable of being logically separated, must ever be kept in living relationship with each other.

In Martin Luther we have a world-historical illustration of the significance of the vital union of these two principles in a commanding religious genius, in a "personality pure and free in God."¹⁰ By an extraordinary experience of the grace of God in Christ Jesus—mediated to him, not indeed directly, yet really, by the Bible,¹¹ he came to the

hand, he accepted "the Rabbinic-Catholic conception of the verbal inspiration of the Scripture," while on the other hand, he "criticized the Scripture" and "dissolved Catholicism in its historical beginnings" (*ibid.*, p. 858); *cf.* *Lehrbuch*, 3rd. ed., pp. 771, 772, 781, 791 f.

⁹ In general, as to the limitations of even the most advanced of the medieval critics of the authority of the hierarchy, see Seeberg, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 132, 174, 177 ff.; Loofs, *Leitfaden*,⁴ p. 658; and *cf.* Kropatscheck, *op. cit.*, p. 74 ("Occam ist in der Kirchengeschichte nicht das einzige Beispiel dafür, dass das Schriftprincip an sich noch nicht das Evangelium bringt.")

¹⁰ Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, i, p. 82.

¹¹ See below, p. 563.

joyous assurance that he was re-born and saved, and then seeing the "entire Scripture"¹² in the light of his new faith, he little by little, not without occasional misgivings and temporary retrogressions, yet on the whole with ever-increasing boldness and thoroughness set the testimony of Scripture against and over all other authorities.

In discussing Luther's relation to the problem of authority in religion, therefore, we shall first consider the development, in his own religious experience and his career as a Reformer, of the principle of the supreme normative authority of the sacred Scripture, and then we shall try to indicate the main features of his teaching in regard to the nature of the Scripture as such authority.

* * * *

On the 17th of July, 1505, Luther entered the Augustinian convent at Erfurt. He took the step under the constraint of deep religious convictions. He hoped by the conscientious performance of monastic duties to "do enough" to "obtain a gracious God."¹³ And as in those days fear¹⁴ was generally the dominant motive in the religious life, he too was specially influenced by the dread of death and of the divine wrath to be revealed in the final judgment.

We cannot give a detailed account of Luther's experiences as a monk, nor of the steps that led to his gradual conversion to the evangelical faith.¹⁵ Only a few of the most important facts can be hinted at.

¹² *Lutheri Opp. Lat. var. arg.* (Erlangen), i, 23: "*ibi iustitiam Dei coepi intelligere eam, qua iustus dono Dei vivit, nempe ex fide. . . . Hic me prorsus renatum esse sensi, et apertis portis in ipsam paradisum intrasse. Ibi continuo alia mihi facies totius scripturae apparuit. Discurrebam deinde per scripturas. . .*"

¹³ *Werke*, Erlangen ed., 16, p. 90.

¹⁴ Cf. Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, i, pp. 127 ff., 188. Michael Angelo's Last Judgment, in the Sistine Chapel, is true to the then popular notion that only by the pleading of the gracious Virgin can the avenging arm of Christ—more an angry Judge than a merciful Savior—be averted.

¹⁵ It is particularly this early chapter in his life that has called forth

The only books that Luther took with him into the monastery were Plautus and Virgil. But it would be a mistake to interpret this interesting fact as meaning that, on his graduation in 1505 from the University of Erfurt—then justly celebrated as the chief centre in North Germany for the revival of classical studies,—he had become an ardent Humanist. Humanism had, indeed, made a permanent impression upon him, but by no means a decisive one.¹⁶ Melanchthon¹⁷ is our authority for the statement that in the

the vast controversial Luther literature of the recent past. Specially serviceable as a guide to the understanding of the problems raised by these publications, and as a critical treatment of the whole subject of Luther's religious and theological development, is Prof. Scheel's "Die Entwicklung Luthers bis zum Abschluss der Vorlesung über den Römerbrief," in *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte*, xxvii Jahrg., 1910, pp. 6.-230. In his *Leitfaden*, etc.,⁴ Prof. Loofs has given a sketch of Luther's ideas during his formative period that is admirable alike for its comprehensiveness and its conciseness. J. Köstlin's *Luthers Theologie*,² 1901, is an invaluable supplement to his biography of Luther, though, as Scheel in the article just named has shown, the work is not free from minor inaccuracies; cf. also Scheel, *Luthers Stellung zur heiligen Schrift*, pp. 5, 7.

¹⁶ A single glance at his "Dictata super Psalterium" 1513-1516, *Werke*, Weimer ed., iii, iv, shows that he had not, even at that time, abandoned the medieval in favor of the new Humanistic exegetical methods. Cf. the excellent monograph by Joh. Preuss, *Die Entwicklung des Schriftprinzips bei Luther bis zur Leipziger Disputation*, 1901. This treatise gives an almost exhaustive list of references to the sources pertaining to this theme, and we take occasion here to express our deep indebtedness to this author. One can only regret that he did not utilize the material at his command for a systematic presentation of the teachings of Luther concerning the Scripture principle. On the relation of Luther to the Humanists, see p. 4.

¹⁷ *Corpus Reformatorum*, vi, p. 159. Luther counts himself among the "moderni" or Nominalists: *Werke*, Weimar ed., ix, p. 9 f.; cf. *Opp. Lat. var. arg.* (Erlangen) 5, p. 137 (1520): "*sum enim Occanicae factionis*." This and the further fact that his two chief teachers in philosophy, Trutvetter and von Usingen, were "moderni" favoring the conciliar as against the curialistic theory of the government of the papal Church, should put us on our guard against unduly stressing the statement made by Luther in 1545, that he had been "*ebrius, imo submersus in dogmatibus papae*" (*Opp. Lat. var. arg.* i, p. 16). Cf. Scheel, *Luthers Stellung*, etc., p. 13. In practice, however, the Nominalists were submissive members of the Church; see n. 9.

convent Luther became intimately acquainted with the later Nominalists, especially Occam, d'Ailly, and Biel, and Luther's own writings show that while from the beginning of his struggle for peace of conscience there was an anti-Nominalistic element in his thinking,¹⁸ he nevertheless showed traces of the influence of these Schoolmen, especially in his eucharistic controversies, to the end of his life. Some of the bolder declarations of these critics of the papal institutions became useful allies to the Reformer in the opening period of his conflict with Rome. But these authorities did not and could not help him in securing a truly evangelical knowledge of the Scriptures. On the contrary, he became filled with despair when, brooding over their speculations concerning predestination, he began to doubt that he was one of the elect.¹⁹ Gerson's practical, devotional tendencies gave the unhappy monk only occasional relief.²⁰

Nor did his perusal of the church fathers directly help him in the crisis of his religious experience. As for Augustine, whom he later so highly prized, and whom as early as 1509 he called the "*nunquam satis laudatus*," it is evident²¹ that he knew nothing of the great North African at first hand before about that very year, when, apparently quite casually, he fell upon some of his works in the library of the Erfurt convent. Scheel is even inclined to place this discovery of Augustine, not in the first, but in the second Erfurt period,²² which began in the fall of 1509 and lasted the greater part of two years. Augustine subsequently proved a mighty inspiration and comfort to Luther in his study of the Scriptures, in his assertion of their authority

¹⁸ Scheel, *Die Entwicklung Luthers, etc.*, p. 91. Cf. Seeberg, as cited, ii, p. 206.

¹⁹ These tortures belonged to "*has poenas . . . tantas ac tam infernales, quantas nec lingua dicere nec calamus scribere nec inexpertus credere potest*," referred to in *Werke*, Weim, ed., i, p. 557, ll. 33 ff. Cf. *Briefe* (ed. DeWette), v, p. 513.

²⁰ Köstlin, *M. Luther*,⁴ p. 81.

²¹ Scheel, *Die Entwicklung, etc.*, p. 123. Cf. Loofs, *Leitfaden*,⁴ p. 689, n. 5, and p. 690.

²² As cited, p. 123.

against the church traditions, and in the development of his theological views. But even after the crisis had been successfully passed, Luther took pains to guard his new-found faith against the imperfect evangelicalism of Augustine.²³

Of special interest, of course, is the question of the influence of the Scriptures themselves upon the monk during his life at Erfurt and at Wittenberg after his removal thither in 1508. He himself testifies that he had not seen a complete Bible until he was in his twentieth year, when he chanced to get hold of one in the university library.²⁴ On his entrance into the monastery a Latin version was given him by the brethren at his request, and he became a diligent student of the Word, being able to quote texts freely and even to tell the page of his copy on which they could be found. The Vicar-General of the order, von Staupitz, had in 1504 established the rule that "the novice shall eagerly read, devoutly hear and zealously learn the sacred Scripture."²⁵ But inner need was a sufficient inducement to the sin-sick monk for hard study of the Bible, and so far as the mere letter of Scripture was concerned, he was rapidly fulfilling the wish of Staupitz that he become a good "*textualis et localis*."

But the sacred volume was still a sealed book to him. The veil of medieval traditions lay over its pages and hid the true message. His sense of guilt due to his failures and transgressions as a monk, and especially his conviction of sin as an all-pervading evil and corrupting power in his heart brought him time and again to the brink of despair. If on one occasion, in more joyous mood, he felt he was

²³ Köstlin, *Luthers Theol.*,² i, p. 28.

²⁴ Cf. the less known testimony in regard to his colleague, Prof. Carlstadt, who had been a doctor of theology eight years before he began to study the Scriptures; Köstlin, *M. Luther*,⁴ p. 94.

²⁵ Benrath, "Luther im Kloster, 1505-1525," in *Schriften d. Ver. f. Reformationsgeschichte*, xxiii Jahrg., 1905, p. 35.

²⁶ Cf. his own maxim as to the "rechte Weise in der Theologia zu studiren,"—"Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio,"; *Werke*, Erlangen ed., 63, pp. 403 f.

in the choir of angels,²⁷ the prevailing tone of his piety was that of one sorrowing for sins for which he knows no asceticism and self-mortification can atone, and for which he feels the just wrath of God is the only issue.

As often happens in similar mental struggles and spiritual agonies, it was the personal touch of a sympathetic friend or two that opened the way of deliverance. His teacher Usingen, in spite of his questionable advice that Luther should prefer the Schoolmen to the Bible, was a man of considerable pastoral wisdom and tact: Luther later recommended him to a tempted brother monk as the best possible comforter.²⁸ Melancthon further informs us, on the basis of frequent references to the matter by Luther, that it was an old monk that called Luther's attention to the meaning of faith, emphasized the clause in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," and cited a telling passage concerning justification by faith from a sermon by St. Bernard.²⁹

To much the same purpose were the confidential talks of the Vicar-General. It was through him that "the light of the Gospel first began to shine" in the heart of the future Reformer.³⁰ Staupitz warned him against mourning for fictitious sins, and against indulging in idle speculations concerning the divine predestination, pointed him to the wounds of Christ, and bade him trust in God. To Staupitz Luther owed a new and truer understanding of the term "penitence."³¹

²⁷ *Opp. Exeget.* Erl. ed., 23, p. 401.

²⁸ *Briefe* (ed. deWette) i, p. 19 (April 15, 1516).

²⁹ *Corpus Ref.* vi, pp. 155, 159. Cf. Loofs, *Leitfaden*,⁴ p. 687.

³⁰ *Briefe* (deWette ed.), ii, p. 408 (Sept. 17, 1523). Schaff, *op. cit.*, vi, p. 119, n. 1, wrongly dates the letter in 1518.

³¹ *Briefe* (ed. deWette), i, 116 (1518). Cf. Scheel, *Die Entwicklung*, etc., p. 100 and n. 102, showing that Köstlin, *Luthers Theol.*, i, p. 24, mistakes the significance of Luther's reference to the time since which the once bitter term "poenitentia" has been sweet and pleasant to him. All that Luther implies is that at the time of the letter (1518) this change had taken place. There is no warrant for placing the change as early as the interview itself. For Luther conducted special biblical

Neither the time nor the specific effect of these interviews with Staupitz can be definitely determined; but it is probable that they took place before Luther went to Wittenberg (1508) and that they marked an important stage in his progress toward the evangelical faith, without, however, securing his immediate conversion thereto.³²

In October, 1508, Luther became professor of philosophy at the University of Wittenberg; in March 1509, he was made a bachelor of theology; on October 4, 1512, a licentiate of theology, and on October 19, 1512, a doctor of theology. This summary of events is symbolic of his early and of his whole career as a professor. He became an indefatigable

investigations to verify the new meaning of the word, and only thereafter—how near this was to the time of writing is not ascertainable—did he find pleasure in the word.

³² See especially Scheel, *Die Entwicklung, etc.*, pp. 100 ff., 109 ff., 116 ff.; 122 ff. In the main he agrees with Loofs, *Leitfaden*, pp. 687 f. His chief contention is that as early as 1508-09 Luther may have had a comforting experience of the grace of God, but that this was not marked by an evangelical knowledge of that passage (Rom. i, 17) with which, as we have seen (p. 557) he connects the great crisis in his early life. Scheel convincingly shows that the Marginal Notes on Augustine and the Lombard—about the only source from Luther himself from which we can draw for a knowledge of his ideas before 1513—are surcharged with the spirit of Biel, and that seemingly evangelical catchwords are to be taken in the traditional, not in any "reformatory" sense. Böhmer and Gottschick, according to Scheel, confuse Luther's experience of grace with his later understanding of the meaning of his experience. There is point also in what Scheel (pp. 125 ff.) urges as against Köstlin, (*Luthers Theol.*² i, pp. 32, 38), namely that Köstlin finds so little of theological significance in Luther's Notes on Augustine and the Lombard for the obvious reason that the too early dating of the decisive change—some time before these Lectures were given, *i.e.*, before 1509—leads him to expect too much in them. Though somewhat critical toward the Nominalists in these annotations, he even misinterprets Augustine in the interests of his own Nominalism. Cf. Scheel, *Luthers Stellung, etc.*, p. 14, as against Undritz ("Die Entwicklung des Schriftprinzips bei Luther in den Anfangsjahren der Reformation," in *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, viii, 1897, p. 570), who seems likewise to make the influence of Staupitz immediately decisive. Undritz's work is marred by numerous errors in his references and by other blemishes due to a misunderstanding of some of the sources.

student of the Scriptures.³³ Little by little, after long and hard struggles, he secured, through independent study of the Bible, a radically new knowledge of the way of eternal life, a knowledge that filled his soul with peace, and cast a bright radiance upon many a hitherto unintelligible statement of the Scriptures. This was his rebirth—his entrance into the paradise of evangelical freedom.³⁴ After this he read Augustine's *De spiritu et litera*, and was happy to find his idea of justification of faith confirmed.

³³ Emphasis has often been laid upon the fact that it was not, in the first instance, the Scriptures themselves which ministered comfort to the distressed monk, but rather the Word of God as current in the religious life of the church (the Creed, Bernard's sermons, and the like) and as reflected in the pious exhortations of such friends as Usingen, the unnamed old monk, and Staupitz. See, *e.g.*, Gennrich, *Der Kampf um die Schrift*, p. 4; Undritz, as cited, p. 569; Brieger, *Der Glaube Luthers in seiner Freiheit von menschlichen Autoritäten*, p. 25; Bolliger, as cited, p. 9. The fact is worthy of mention, but it is easy to give it a misleading significance. It is certainly not to be taken as if the Word of God had for Luther an existence utterly independent of the Scriptures. Cf. the careful statement of Dorner: "He was thus at first led to the light and peace, not through the reading of the Holy Scriptures, but just as little in an unhistorical and purely subjective way, but rather through the living utterance of the Church, although not in such a way that it was the authority of the Church which lent to the utterance its highest pacifying credentials and certainty; in his case, moreover, the postulate was not awaiting, that that utterance of the symbol regarding the forgiveness of sins, the subject matter, accordingly, which effected his salvation, be purely Christian and Scriptural; but neither was he brought to rest by the authority of the Scriptures, in which, previously to his experience in the faith, he had no living belief, although it is not to be denied that his development in the faith only reached a firm and clear conclusion, after he had become more intimate with the Holy Scriptures, especially with the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians" (*History of Protestant Theology*, i. p. 221). Cf. also Kunze, *Glaubensregel, Heilige Schrift und Taufbekenntnis*, p. 500, who rightly disparages the present tendency to magnify "was Luther 'erfuhr und erlebte'" and to forget that he had these experiences "ganz wesentlich an der Schrift und mit der Schrift." Berger, *Martin Luther in kulturgeschichtlicher Darstellung*, i, pp. 141 f., fails to do justice to the service that the Scripture, especially Paul, rendered Luther in his formative period; the "kulturgeschichtliche" considerations are not to be ignored, but neither are they to be taken as an adequate stimulus for Luther's "genius."

³⁴ See above, n. 12.

The date for this decisive change in his religious life and his theological thinking can be approximately fixed. On the one hand, the first Lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515) clearly reveal the new understanding of faith, justification and grace.³⁵ On the other hand, during his trip to Rome (1510 or 1511), his inner state—if we may accept the testimony concerning his ascent of the *santa scala*—is one of conflict and uncertainty. Furthermore, as has been said, the Notes on Augustine and the Lombard, dating from 1509 to 1511, cannot be interpreted satisfactorily in a truly evangelical sense.³⁶ The change must have taken place in 1512 or 1513, just before the Lectures on the Psalms were given.

The new faith became the principle of a new life. Battling for his own salvation, he made the victorious issue in his personal conflict his guide and criterion in his successful ministration to the spiritual needs of his age. He rediscovered the Gospel of Christ for his generation. Upon the basis of his new knowledge of salvation he advanced—quite commonly it was his foes who drove him forward—to oppose the antagonistic elements in the prevailing scholastic theology and in the whole mass of ecclesiastical traditions. For a time, indeed, it looked as if his own experience of the grace of God were destined to become the centre around which the entire religious, moral, intellectual, social and even political life of the period would fashion itself in the form of a new organism of civilization. Erelong, to be sure, the limitations of his genius became apparent, but this at least he had accomplished: within the domain of the

³⁵ Cf. Loofs, *Leitfaden*,⁴ pp. 696 ff. Hence Luther's statement made in 1545 (*Opp. Lat. var. arg.*, Erlangen, i, p. 22) that he did not grasp the sense of Rom. i, 17 till the time of his *second* lecturing on the Psalms (1519) is due to a slip of memory. Cf. Scheel, *Die Entwicklung, etc.*, pp. 112 ff., and Loofs, *ibid.*, pp. 688 ff. Denifle's idea that Luther adopted the new view of justification by faith about 1515 as a boon to his carnal desires—that being according to Denifle's ingenious use of the evidence the time of the monk's deepest degradation—is scarcely worthy of serious consideration (cf. Scheel, as cited, pp. 105 ff.).

³⁶ See note 32.

traditional piety he had established a generically different type of Christianity—a new view of God, man, and their relations in Christ Jesus.³⁷ And it was out of this life-transforming experience, as from a single tap-root, that Luther's characteristic views of faith, and of the Scriptures that nourished his faith, were developed.³⁸

Taking our stand, then, in the period immediately following his conversion to evangelicalism, let us ascertain some of his leading ideas concerning the Scripture, as these are reflected in his *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513-15)³⁹ and in his Lectures on Romans (1515-16).⁴⁰

We shall have occasion later, when we attempt a systematic presentation of his views on this subject to revert to these early sources. For the present it will suffice to point to a few of the characteristic utterances that show the path of future progress alike in constructive theologizing and in criticism of the traditional authorities revered in the Church.⁴¹

The true centre of the Scripture is Christ, more accu-

³⁷ On the significance of Protestantism as a generic "Weltanschauung," see the suggestive statements by A. Kuyper, *Calvinism* (The L. P. Stone Lectures for 1898-99), pp. 12 ff.

³⁸ Cf. Thimme, "Luthers Stellung zur Heiligen Schrift, ihrem Wert und ihrer Autorität," in *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, vii, 1896, p. 644.

³⁹ *Werke*, Weimar ed., iii, iv.

⁴⁰ J. Ficker, "Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief, 1515-1516" in *Anfänge reformatorischer Bibelauslegung*, Vol. i, 1908. For our purpose it is not necessary to enter into the controversy as to the amount of Neo-Platonic mysticism, if any, there is in the Lectures on the Psalms or those on Romans. Scheel, *Die Entwicklung*, etc., pp. 164 ff. denies the presence of any such influence in either series of expositions, while Loofs, *Leitfaden*,⁴ pp. 692 ff., following Hunzinger (*Luthersstudien*, i, *Luthers Neuplatonismus in der Psalmvorlesung von 1513-1516*) goes the length of saying that Augustine's Neo-Platonic mysticism is the very key for the understanding of Luther's theology in these years. Ficker, as cited, makes much of the German mysticism in Luther in this period, but can see no far-reaching influence from the Neo-Platonic type of mysticism.

⁴¹ Cf. Preuss, as cited, pp. 9 ff., and Scheel, *Luthers Stellung*, etc., pp. 17 ff.

rately, Christ crucified.⁴² In the four Gospels is the whole Scripture, and they are in every Scripture.⁴³ No one should interpret the Bible according to his own desires; but should take it to the fountain, that is, the cross of Christ.⁴⁴ Therefore Christ is the centre and end of all, to whom all things look and whom they show forth.⁴⁵ Only through knowing Christ can one understand the Scripture, for he is its sun and its truth.⁴⁶ The whole Old Testament speaks of Christ.⁴⁷ Solomon, like David, had a clear knowledge of Christ.⁴⁸ What the pasture is to cattle, homes to men, nests to birds, that the sacred Scripture is to believing souls.⁴⁹ It affords them all they need.⁵⁰ It is an abundant fountain to all who thirst for wholesome teach-

⁴² *Werke*, Weim. ed., iv, p. 153, ll. 27 f.: "*Ego non intelligo usquam in Script. nisi Christum crucifixum.*" Cf. *ibid.*, iii, p. 13, ll. 2 ff.: "*Non iudicavi me scire aliquid inter vos, nisi Ihesum Christum et hunc crucifixum.*"

⁴³ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 597, ll. 31 ff.

⁴⁴ In a German sermon preached November 11, 1515 (Weimar ed., i, p. 52, ll. 15-19).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 368, ll. 22 f.: "*quia est centrum omnium, quo habito omnia habentur in circumferentia et ipse in omnibus omnia adimplet.*" Cf. the Scholia on Romans (Ficker, as cited), p. 240, l. 10: "*Quod universa Scriptura de solo Christo est ubique*"; and p. 9, l. 15. Cf. the Glosses on Romans, *ibid.*, p. 4, l. 20: "*quod tota [sacra Scriptura] de Christo sit intelligenda.*"

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 620, ll. 18 f.: "ja das ist die rechte regel. wer all psalmen horet, gleych als auss Christus mund geredet."

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, iii, p. 319, ll. 28 ff.; p. 132, ll. 21 ff.; i, p. 219, ll. 24 ff. (1517): "das beken ich vor mich. alss oft ich weniger yn der schrifft dan Christum funden hab, byn ich nach nie sat wurden. Alss oft aber ich meer dan Christum funden hab, byn ich nie armer wurden." Of course, some of the Humanists had already seen the central significance of Christ in the Scriptures. Cf. e.g., on Erasmus, K. Müller, *Kirchengeschichte*, ii, Erster Halbband, pp. 207 ff. From him Oecolampad is said to have learned the maxim, "*Nihil in sacris litteris praeter Christum quaerendum.*" But the Humanistic conception of Christ as Savior was defective from the religious point of view and for that very reason also ethically inadequate. Cf. Scheel, *Luthers Stellung, etc.*, p. 18 (against Seeberg, as cited, p. 210).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, iv, p. 504, ll. 19 f.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, iii, 640, ll. 31 ff.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, iii, 587, ll. 29 ff.

ing.⁵¹ Every divine Scripture is living and enduring.⁵² The chief duty of the Church is to proclaim the Word of God.⁵³ The bishops, priests and teachers of the day are guilty of preaching "*larvas opinionum et questionum et nugarum*" instead of the true seed of the Word.⁵⁴ From this seed come the children of God.⁵⁵ As living speech makes living impressions on the living hearer, so the Gospel spiritually makes spiritual impressions, spiritually living and eternal knowledge in spiritually living hearts.⁵⁶ Not to be content with the Gospel and to build up another teaching is to be guilty of tempting God.⁵⁷ The Gospel is to be heard as if we were listening to the Master present, to Christ speaking.⁵⁸ The ancient fathers were right in saying that nothing should be done, save as it conformed to the testimonies of the Scriptures and the sacred teachers.⁵⁹ The Scripture is sufficient to refute the heretics with their carnal pride.⁶⁰ In a sermon of about 1517 he speaks of three lines of argument, "ratione," "autoritate," and "similitudine," and then explains the second by saying "autoritate, teutonice mit *gesprochenen der Schrift*."⁶¹ On the basis of his better knowl-

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 406, ll. 8 f.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 342, l. 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 261, ll. 13 f.: "*Ecclesia . . . captiva in auctoritatem Scripturae, non docens nisi verbum dei.*" Cf. the Scholia on Romans (ed. Ficker), p. 278, ll. 6 ff.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 216, ll. 25 ff. Cf. i, p. 13, ll. 35 ff.: "*quae est enim dementia et tam perversa perversitas ut de bonis moribus cogites et non magis cures, quomodo hi fiant et sint quibus bonos mores paras?*"

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 345, ll. 13 ff. Cf. i, p. 11, l. 15; iii, p. 216, ll. 28 ff. It will be observed that Luther uses "*Scriptura*" and "*verbum Dei*" as synonymous. On occasion he does distinguish them as in i, p. 506, l. 18 f.: "*scripturam sanctam et verbum dei.*" For our present purpose it is not necessary to dwell on this fact, nor to raise the question as to the relation of the two to each other and to the Holy Spirit who works through them (or also apart from them).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 457, ll. 3 ff.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 577, ll. 39 ff.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, iv, p. 535, l. 1 f. Cf. the Scholia on Romans (ed. Ficker), p. 243, ll. 3 ff.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, iv, p. 318, l. 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 578, ll. 5 ff.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, iv, p. 591, ll. 6 ff. Cf. iv, p. 639, ll. 17 f. (1517?): "*sed*

edge of the Scripture he even begins in a modest way to criticize some church customs and traditions, such as private confession⁶² and veneration of the saints.⁶³

As Luther had been the first doctor of theology to devote all his academic lectures to the Bible,⁶⁴ so his influence in behalf of the Scriptures soon secured their primacy in the thought and labor of his colleagues.⁶⁵ His exegetical studies were constantly turned to practical account in his ministrations in the monastery and in the parish church, and this application of the truth in turn led to his clearer perception and more perfect possession of it.⁶⁶ It was his determination to have the teaching of the Scriptures kept "pure and secure" that in due time constrained him to oppose the established ecclesiastical business of selling indulgences.⁶⁷

But before we take up the issues growing out of that memorable controversy, let us briefly notice the more or less critical attitude that Luther had already assumed before 1517 in regard to such traditional authorities as Aristotle, the Scholastics and the church fathers.

"See how aptly Aristotle in his philosophy serves theology," exclaims Luther in a Christmas sermon of 1514.⁶⁸ "This beautiful philosophy, though understood by few, is useful to the highest theology."⁶⁹ And in the realm of *requiritur quod sit contra scripturam sanctam, si debet cum auctoritate refutari.*"

⁶² *Ibid.*, iv, p. 674, ll. 20 ff. (1516?); cf. i, p. 98, l. 31 (October, 1516).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, i, p. 413, l. 19 (1518). On similar criticisms in the Glosses and Scholia on Romans, see Ficker, as cited, pp. lxxxv ff. On indulgences, see the Scholia, *ibid.*, pp. 123, 244; on relics, *ibid.*, p. 305, ll. 1 ff.: "*Item Princeps* [Frederick the Wise] *et Episcopus* [the Primate Albert of Mainz] *reliquiis emulantur sese.*"

⁶⁴ Köstlin, *Luthers Theol.*,² i, p. 42.

⁶⁵ Ficker, as cited, pp. lxxv ff. and p. lxxviii, n. 2 (an excerpt from Lang's Preface, March 1516, to Paul's Epistle to Titus, showing Lang's new attitude to the Scriptures).

⁶⁶ Cf. the Scholia on Romans, as cited, p. 272, ll. 13 ff.: "*ut et ego practice exponam Scripture sensum, ut ex similibus similia intelligatis.*"

⁶⁷ *Werke*, Erlangen, 28, p. 350.

⁶⁸ *Werke*, Weimar, i, p. 28, l. 19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29, l. 28.

natural science the ancient sage is favorably mentioned in the Scholia on the Romans.⁷⁰ But in the domain of ethics and theology he becomes the object of increasingly severe criticism and condemnation. He is regarded as the patron and champion of the scholastic philosophy. His ethics, indeed, are characterized as the worst foe to grace.⁷¹ The syllogistic forms which owed their currency to him are not adequate for divine terms.⁷² Already in the Marginal Notes on Augustine (about 1509) we find a reference to "*fabulator Aristoteles cum suis frivolis defensoribus*," and in the Notes on the Lombard (1510-11) we read a not more flattering characterization "*Aristotelis rancidi philosophi*,"⁷⁴ whose philosophy has brought forth many monstrous things.⁷⁵ The good elements in Aristotle are stolen possessions.⁷⁶ In the Lectures on the Psalms Luther finds fault with him for promoting a disputatious temper among the learned,⁷⁷ and for furthering the cause of Antichrist by turning his disciples away from things divine.⁷⁸ Luther especially attacks the ethical maxim of the Stagirite that we become righteous by doing the right.⁷⁹ In May, 1517, he wrote to his friend Lang, that the new theology and Augus-

⁷⁰ Ficker, as cited, p. 81, l. 16. See the Index for the many others references to Aristotle, a few of these being neutral toward him, but the great majority being hostile.

⁷¹ *Werke*, Weimar ed., i, 226, Thesis no. 41: "*Tota fere Aristotelis Ethica pessima est gratiae inimica*."

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 226, no. 47. Cf. Dieckhoff, *Luthers Lehre in ihrer ersten Gestalt*, p. 41 f., and n. 2, where reference is made to the similar Theses of the Heidelberg Disputation (1518; *Opp. Lat. var. arg.*, Erlangen, i, p. 389).

⁷³ *Werke*, Weimar, ix, p. 23, ll. 7 ff.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43, l. 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57, l. 12. Cf. i, 612, ll. 5 ff. (1518), where Aristotle is blamed for the utter confusion into which the Scholastic theology has fallen.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, i, p. 28, l. 21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 382, ll. 20 ff.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 423, ll. 5 ff.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, iv, p. 3, ll. 32 f. Cf. i, p. 84, ll. 19 ff.; p. 226, no. 40; p. 494, l. 21 ("*garrulitates dialecticae*"); the Scholia on Romans, as cited pp. 178, 183 *et passim*; and Scheel, *Die Entwicklung Luthers*, etc., pp. 148 f.

tine were progressing nicely at the University, and that Aristotle would soon be dethroned.⁸⁰ Certainly on the eve of the Reformation the break with this venerated "authority" of the Middle Ages was complete.⁸¹

The connection between Aristotle and the Schoolmen being what it was, Luther could not fail, with his ripening evangelicalism, to express his growing dissatisfaction with these medieval theologians. As we have seen, he classifies himself with the Nominalists, the "*moderni*," who sought to hold a course between the *via Scoti* and the *via Thomae*. He naturally praises his master Occam,⁸² but after the early Marginal Notes on Augustine and the Lombard, it is rather surprising to see how little the Schoolmen are quoted and how often they are attacked. Duns Scotus is repeatedly named, even in these Notes, with disapprobation.⁸³ The Lombard is praised on one occasion as the best of all the teachers because of his reserved handling of the question of the constitution of the angels.⁸⁴ Much later the Reformer speaks of this master with appreciation, though taking exception to his views of faith and justification as being "too thin and too weak."⁸⁵ But even in the Notes on the Lombard the author ventures to regard a particular solution offered by this schoolman as invalid because erroneous.⁸⁶ Biel too is criticized.⁸⁷

In the Lectures on the Psalter Thomas is named but once.⁸⁸ Bonaventura and Hugo of St. Victor receive more

⁸⁰ *Briefwechsel* (ed. Enders) i, p. 100, ll. 10 ff.

⁸¹ *Werke*, Weimar, i, p. 226, Thesis 44: "*Immo theologus non fit nisi id fiat sine Aristotele.*"

⁸² *Werke*, Weimar, ix, p. 33, ll. 30 f.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, ix, p. 16, ll. 7, 14; p. 24, ll. 24 f.; p. 43, ll. 22 f.; p. 62, l. 20. Cf. Scheel, *Die Entwicklung Luthers*, pp. 127 ff.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ix, p. 62, ll. 16 ff.

⁸⁵ *Werke*, Erl., 25, p. 258 (anno 1539).

⁸⁶ *Werke*, Weimar, ix, p. 85, ll. 6 ff.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74, ll. 8 ff.

⁸⁸ Preuss, as cited, p. 20. The passage is *ibid.*, iv, p. 207, l. 25. There can be little doubt about the validity of Denifle's statement—repeated time and again by Grisar in his biography of Luther—that the Reformer never became thoroughly acquainted with the Angelic Doctor or in-

consideration, and Bernard is favored most of all after Augustine.

In the Christmas sermon of 1514, Luther already dissociates himself from his fellow Nominalists,⁸⁹ and in the Theses of September, 1516, composed by Bernhardt and publicly discussed under Luther as the presiding officer and defended by him, there is conscious opposition to the Lombard and the Pelagianism of the Schoolmen.⁹⁰

In the Lectures on Romans the Thomists and Scotists are named but once,⁹¹ and the only Scholastics named with any frequency are the Lombard and Bernard. But as a class the "*subtiles theologi*," "*nostri theologi*," "*scolastici*," "*philosophi*," "*scolastici theologi*" "*morales*," "*logici*," "*recentiores doctores*" receive much unfavorable consideration in the Scholia, because of their anti-evangelical or unevangelical views of sin and grace.⁹²

In a letter to his friend Lang (September ? 1516) a similarly severe verdict is expressed against Biel and Scotus.⁹³ About the same time Carlstadt praises his colleague Luther as the "sharpest doctor of theology" who was wont to declare that "the Schoolmen are the greatest strangers to the teachings of Christ."⁹⁴ Scholasticism has become for Luther a "*studium vanitatis et perditionis*," with which he has done and from which he deems it his duty to dissuade men in favor of the Scriptures.⁹⁵ He has as a matter of fact

deed with any of the Schoolmen of the culminating period of Scholasticism. For a characteristic later judgment on Aquinas, see *ibid.*, viii, p. 127, ll. 19 f. (anno 1521).

⁸⁹ *Werke*, Weimar, i, p. 21, l. 38.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 145 ff.

⁹¹ Ficker, as cited, p. lviii.

⁹² Ficker, as cited, pp. 23 f., 55 ff., *et passim*.

⁹³ *Briefwechsel* (ed. Enders), i, p. 55, ll. 43 ff.

⁹⁴ Ficker, *op. cit.*, p. lxx, quoting Barge, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*, ii, p. 534. Cf. *Werke*, Erl., 63, p. 162, where the Schoolmen are compared with Origen, "der durch die Philosophia und Vernunft die Schrift verbittert und verderbet hat." Cf. the later facetious accusation (*Werke*, Weim., i, p. 507, ll. 37 ff.): "*Scholastici enim sunt, id est ludicri et lusores, immo et illusores tam sui quam aliorum, qui neque quid sit litera neque quid spiritus cognoverunt.*"

⁹⁵ Scholia on Romans, as cited, p. 199, ll. 7 ff.

turned Nominalism against and beyond itself. In the philosophic Theses of September, 1517, he levels his shafts alike at Aristotle, Scotus, and Biel, not sparing even his beloved Occam. His dissatisfaction with these traditional church authorities was later (1519) expressed in the terse sentence: "I there had lost Christ, now in Paul I have found him."⁹⁶

Of all the fathers whom Luther consulted Augustine was by far the most important and influential. This is apparent in the earliest as well as in the latest sources of the period under consideration, *i.e.*, to 1517.⁹⁷ Many others are mentioned, but their authority is determined more and more by the amount of their agreement with Augustine and the Scriptures. The greatest of the fathers is, of course, specially useful to Luther in his conflict with the Pelagianism of the Schoolmen. In fine, it was Luther's devotion to the Psalter and to the Epistle to the Romans that gave Augustine the victory at Wittenberg to which reference has already been made. Luther has virtually outgrown Nominalism, Scotism, Thomism, and the lower Catholic elements of Augustinism.⁹⁸

As to the papal hierarchy, Luther's views before 1517—and, as we shall see, for some time thereafter—were those of a submissive and dutiful son of the Church. If on occasion he criticizes the popes, it is not their official teachings but their characters and their conduct that are aimed at.⁹⁹ In the Scholia on Romans he indulges in accusations and complaints that reveal his new consciousness as to his own

⁹⁶ *Werke*, Weim., ii, p. 414, ll. 28. At the same time he does not entirely reject the Scholastics (*ibid.*, i, p. 391 ll. 5 ff.); "nit dass ich sie gantz vorwirff, dan sie haben das yhre than." He only insists that their opinions should be supported with "schrifften und vornunft."

⁹⁷ See *Werke*, Weimar, ix, p. 29, ll. 5 f. (anno 1510-11); p. 38, ll. 28 f. ("If the blessed Augustine did not say something else, I should say"); p. 53, l. 21; Scholia on Romans, as cited (see Index).

⁹⁸ Cf. Scheel, *Die Entwicklung Luthers*, p. 181; Ficker, pp. lxxviii ff.

⁹⁹ *Werke*, Weim., iii, p. 598, l. 30 ("*superbi pontifices*"); *ibid.*, p. 235, l. 34 ("*quando ruunt etiam pontifices et sacerdotes*").

¹⁰⁰ Scholia, as cited, p. 301, ll. 19 f.: "*Meum est dicere, quecunque videro non recta fieri, etiam in sublimioribus.*"

mission.¹⁰⁰ He is specially vigorous in his attacks on the pomp, extravagance and worldiness of the prelates and the varied abominations of the curia.¹⁰¹ He demands the abolition of some of the fast and feast days and the amendment of almost the entire *Decretum*.¹⁰² On the other hand, he still urges obedience to every word of a prelate, as if toward Christ himself.¹⁰³ There is in general a noticeable tendency to find fault with the ecclesiastical rulers and at the same time to commend the better behavior of the temporal powers.¹⁰⁴

Such was the position of rather unstable equilibrium in which Luther stood on the eve of the Reformation: free and bold in his criticism of ecclesiastical abuses, filled with a keen sense of his widening vocation for the improvement of the old order of things, or rather for the introduction of a new one, yet firmly and closely bound to the authority of the Church. His knowledge of the Scriptures was being constantly deepened and perfected,¹⁰⁵ but as yet their authority was inextricably interwoven with the influences of the age-long traditions of the papal Church. If, as we have seen, he had begun to entertain a more spiritual conception of the Church as the creation of the pure Gospel, nevertheless even as a derived authority the Church in practice was the supreme arbiter in matters of faith and conduct, capable

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-302; and cf. p. 319, l. 28, where it is said that at Rome "*Omnia sunt devorata per dispensationes.*"

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 317, ll. 28.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 88, ll. 10 f.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xcvi.

¹⁰⁵ We need not dwell upon the fact that it was this knowledge of the Scriptures that delivered Luther from the danger of mystic spiritualism. Ficker, as cited, gives a careful estimate of the mysticism in Luther's Lectures on Romans both before and after Tauler's influence entered, and shows that in these very Lectures he led the German mysticism beyond itself (pp. lxxxii ff.). Cf. Loofs, *Leitfaden*,⁴ pp. 723 f., and his *Luthers Stellung z. Mittelalter u. z. Neuzeit*, p. 27, n. 1; Köstlin, *Luthers Theol.*,² i, p. 118, who rightly stresses Luther's deep sense of sin as a safeguard against the subjectivism of the mystic; Harnack, *Lehrbuch*,⁴ p. 846; and Scheel, *Die Entwicklung Luthers*, p. 201, who minimizes the influence of every type of mysticism upon Luther.

of expressing itself in infallible terms in the deliverances alike of the pope and of the councils.¹⁰⁶ As in the Lectures on the Psalms he still regarded St. Peter as the "prince of the Apostles and of the Churches,"¹⁰⁷ so in a sermon of 1516 he declared that "all the works and merits of Christ are in the hands of the pope,"¹⁰⁸ and he closed the Theses of September, 1517, "*contra scholasticam theologiam*" with the statement; "In these matters we wish to say nothing and believe we have said nothing that does not agree with the Catholic Church and the ecclesiastical teachers."¹⁰⁹

It was the controversy concerning the more celebrated Ninety-five Theses on indulgences that led Luther to a clearer discernment of the relation of the primary authority of the Scriptures to the secondary authority of the Church. A practical issue presented itself to him as a conscientious pastor that compelled him to raise the question as to how far, according to the Church's teaching, the power of the pope with respect to indulgences extended. This was his chief concern in the nailing of these Theses to the door of the Castle Church on October 31, 1517. The theory of indulgences was still an open academic question, and as one entrusted with the cure of souls and as a professor of theology he wished not only to protest in this more public way against an evil which he had already denounced in the pulpit and the class room, but also to clarify his own mind by means of a discussion by suitable representatives of the Church. But the issue thus raised soon presented a conflict of basal principles. The controversy was bound to centre in the very question that had led to Luther's conversion to evangelicalism—the question of the forgiveness of sins—and that, for the rank and file of church members, had resulted in the elaboration of that sacrament which came to occupy

¹⁰⁶ *Werke*, Weimar, i, p. 444, ll. 17 ff.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, iv, p. 169, l. 25.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, i, p. 67, ll. 31 ff.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, i, p. 228, ll. 34 ff.

the largest place in their religious life, the sacrament of penance.¹¹⁰

The Theses themselves—the cry of an oppressed conscience that was destined soon to be heard throughout Germany and all Europe—present inconsistencies of the sort that quite naturally characterize a transition like that which Luther was making from the fetters of tradition to the freedom of evangelical faith. It is significant for our purpose that while he makes no attack upon the pope or the Roman Church,¹¹¹ or even her doctrines, he nowhere regards the prevalent theology as a genuine authority or even supports himself by its teachings.

The first Thesis strikes the keynote of the series: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in saying, 'Repent ye, etc.,' intended that the whole life of the Christian should be penitence." The most advanced positions are those taken in Theses 36, 37, and 62; "Every Christian who feels true compunction duly has plenary remission of pain and guilt, even without letters of pardon"; "Every true Christian, whether living or dead, partakes of all the benefits of Christ and of the Church given him by God, even without letters of pardon"; "The true treasure of the Church is the holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God."¹¹² These decla-

¹¹⁰ Kolde, *Luthers Stellung zu Concil und Kirche*, p. vii, et passim, insists that the "cardinal" issue between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is an ecclesiological one. Certainly the differences can be conveniently set forth in ecclesiological terms. But after all the constitution of the Church, in the one case as in the other, is but an outer expression of fundamental religious and theological principles. The two systems are generically different organisms and therefore any vital element of either may be said, when contrasted with the corresponding member of the other, to have a "cardinal" importance. Cf. Harnack's suggestive series of formulas each one of which may be said to be capable of holding Luther's Christianity as a whole; *Lehrbuch*,⁴ iii, pp. 834-847.

¹¹¹ Cf. Thesis No. 9 (*Werke*. Weimar, i, p. 233, ll. 17 f.: "*Inde bene nobis facit spiritussanctus in papa. . .*"; and Thesis 7: "*Nulli prorsus remittit deus culpam, quin simul eum subiiciat humiliatum in omnibus sacerdoti suo vicario.*"

¹¹² *Ibid.* On the theological import of the Theses, see Köstlin, *Luthers Theol.*,² pp. 159-170.

rations contain the germinal ideas of the new faith, and though some of the Theses are more Catholic than evangelical, nevertheless they implicitly, if not explicitly, call into question the power of the pope.¹¹³ No wonder the sharp-eyed Eck complained of their "*irreverentia*" with respect to the pontiff.

Indeed the whole course of the immediately following controversy showed that Rome¹¹⁴ early and clearly saw the scope of the issue; nothing less than the papal authority itself was at stake. We can only briefly glance at the first stages of the conflict.

Tetzel, the Dominican monk whose scandalous peddling of the jubilee indulgence of 1514 had brought matters to a crisis in Wittenberg, issued two series of counter-theses, composed for him by Prof. Wimpina of the University of Frankfort-on-the-Oder: one attacking Luther's views on indulgences (Theses 1-106); and the other (Theses 1-50) specifically taking up the main question—that of the "*potes-tas Papae*." These latter propositions set forth the traditional curialism in the boldest and most arrogant way. "Christians are to be taught why the power of the pope is supreme in the Church, and instituted solely by God, (and) that it can be restricted or enlarged by no mere man, nor by the whole world together, but only by God" (Th. 1); that he is superior to the whole Church and to a council, and that his decrees are to be humbly obeyed (Th. 3); that he alone determines matters of faith, and himself authoritatively interprets the sense of Scripture, and that it is his business to approve or disapprove all words and works of others (Th. 4); "that the judgment of the pope, in matters that pertain to faith and are necessary to human welfare,

¹¹³ Cf. Th. 91, in which he presumes to ascribe his own more evangelical ideas on indulgences to the pope himself: "*Si ergo venie secundum spiritum et mentem Pape predicarentur, facile illa omnia solverentur, immo non essent.*" See also Theses 20, 42, 74.

¹¹⁴ See the letter to Pope Leo by Silvester Prierias, prefixed to his *Dialogus* against Luther's Theses, in Löscher, *Vollständige Reformation-Acta*, ii, p. 13.

can by no means err" (Th. 5) or at least it does not happen that he himself errs in affirming a judgment concerning such matters (Th. 6); that the Church holds many things as Catholic truths, which are not contained in the canonical Scriptures in the proper form of the words (Th. 16) nor in the ancient Fathers (Th. 17); that all are heretics who try to take away from the Roman Church the privilege delivered to her by the supreme head of all the churches (Th. 26); that all ought to follow the Roman Church as their teacher (Th. 27); that the "assertions of teachers that lead the people to a schism, like the proposition that a bad prelate or prince is not to be obeyed, or that the pope and his bulls are not to be believed, are altogether seditious" (Th. 33).¹¹⁵

Early in 1518,¹¹⁶ Luther wrote a letter to his superior, Scultetus, the Bishop of Brandenburg, which is interesting from our point of view for several reasons. It shows, for example, how reluctant he still is to question the authority of the Church in the issue he has himself forced upon the public.¹¹⁷ Again, he here groups together "*Scripturas*," "*doctores ecclesiasticos*," and "*ipsos canones*" as the authorities which he is willing to acknowledge in his handling of

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 518 ff. Cf. Kolde, as cited, p. 15, who rightly says that Luther, in the judgment of his foes, was a heretic, not so much because he had a different idea about indulgences from that of the curia, but "because he ventured to have an opinion at all, where according to those infallibilists he was by no means entitled to have one."

¹¹⁶ Kolde, *op. cit.*, p. 17, and Undritz, *op. cit.*, p. 578, follow the traditional date of this letter, May 22, 1518. But it must have been written considerably before March 5, for reasons given by Enders, *op. cit.*, p. 151, n. 1. The Weimar editor dates it Feb. 6, Enders Feb. 13. As Scheel, *Luthers Stellung, etc.*, p. 27, shows, the considerations that Undritz (p. 577) brings forward in regard to Luther's postponing the main question as to the pope's power fall to the ground by reason of this error in the dating of the letter.

¹¹⁷ Enders, as cited, i, p. 149, ll. 23 ff.: "*visum est id optimum consilium . . . interim de tanta re disputare, donec ecclesia sancta statueret, quid sentiendum foret.*" Cf. the statement in a letter to Egranus, early in April of the same year (*ibid.*, p. 182, ll. 4 ff.): "*Primum placet, quod omnia sub iudicium ecclesiae, imprimis Ordinarii tui (ut dicitur) submittis.*" On the slowness with which Luther framed his new ideas of the Church, cf. Kolde, as cited, p. 26.

the evils connected with the indulgence business.¹¹⁸ The canonists who talk without a text and the scholastic teachers who hold similar opinions but offer no proofs are not worthy of consideration: indeed, if it is a disgrace for a jurist to speak without a text, it is a much greater one for a theologian to do so, that is to speak, not without the text of Aristotle—him they quote altogether too much—"but without our text, that is, the text of sacred Scripture, and the ecclesiastical canons, and the Fathers."¹¹⁹ This trio of "authorities" is maintained for some time—the *Asterisci* give several instances of the combination—but more and more it is the Scriptures that are emphasized. In his letter to Trutvetter (May 9, 1518) he expresses the conviction that the Church cannot be reformed unless "the canons, decretals, scholastic theology, philosophy, logic, as now held, be completely rooted out and other studies instituted; . . . that the purest studies of the Bible and the holy fathers be brought back once more."¹²⁰

It was probably early in January, 1518, that Luther received Silvester Prierias' *Dialogus . . . in praesumptuosas M. Lutheri conclusiones de potestate Papae*.¹²¹ The author's standpoint is that of Tetzel-Wimpina. He builds his papal absolutism upon four "*fundamenta*." Of these the first declared that "the universal Church virtually is the Roman Church, the head of all the churches, and the Pontifex maximus." Representatively it is the college of cardinals, but virtually it is the pope. The second axiom is that just as the universal Church cannot err in determining a matter of faith or morals, so also a true council cannot err ("*incluso capite*"), nor can the pontiff when he speaks "*ex officio suo*" for the ascertainment of the truth. The third foundation was to the effect that "whosoever does not stand on the teaching of the Roman Church and of the pope, as the in-

¹¹⁸ Enders, i, p. 149 ll. 28 f.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 30 ff, 41 ff.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, i, p. 189, ll. 45 ff.

¹²¹ It may be found in Löschner, as cited, ii, pp. 12-40, and in the Erlangen edition, *Opp. Lat. var. arg.*, 344-377.

fallible rule of faith, from which even the sacred Scripture draws its force and authority [*"robur trahit et auctoritatem"*] is a heretic." In the fourth of these "norms" Silvester affirms that the Roman Church can determine matters of faith and morals by deeds as well as by words, and that therefore he who thinks evil of the teaching and deeds of the Church is a heretic as much as he who thinks evil of the truth of the Scriptures.

So daring an assertion of the papal prerogatives made Luther at first regard the work as spurious. Necessarily it constrained him to investigate more thoroughly than ever not only the content of the Christian faith but also the reasons for accepting it.¹²² We shall have to return to this treatise when we consider Luther's reply.

It has well been said that while Luther's radical friends exerted for the most part a restraining influence upon him, his most reckless foes spurred him on.¹²³ This *Dialogus* furnishes one illustration of this fact. Another may be found in Luther's *Asterisci*, finished some time in March, 1518, and privately circulated in manuscript form.¹²⁴ They were composed as a refutation of Eck's *Obelisci*. Significant is the initial statement that in the whole chaos of Eck's assertions there is "nothing of the sacred letters, nothing of the ecclesiastical fathers, nothing of the canons"—the same trio of still recognized authorities which we found in the letter to Bishop Scultetus—but "*omnia scholasticissima, opiniosissima meraque somnia*" are mixed together.¹²⁵ Christ is on the side of the "ecclesiastici"—the acknowledged church teachers—while the "scholastici" can take refuge only in Aristotle.¹²⁶ Their deliverances are of no account for Luther save as they are supported by the church

¹²² Cf. Dorner, *History of Prot. Theol.* i, p. 90.

¹²³ Undritz, as cited, p. 582, Kolde, as cited, p. 55.

¹²⁴ The editor of the Weimar edition (i, p. 279) claims that the *Asterisci* went to press for the first time when the first collection of Luther's works was published at Wittenberg in 1545.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 281, ll. 29 ff.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 313, ll. 16.

doctrines.¹²⁷ More important is the accusation that the Schoolmen "defile" the Scriptures.¹²⁸ But boldest of all is the assertion that "the pope is a man and can err,"¹²⁹ and that a council is superior to the pope.¹³⁰

At the Disputation, held in Heidelberg on April 26, 1518, under Luther's presidency, on the occasion of a regular chapter meeting of the Augustinian monks, the Theses discussed were essentially his work. They reflect his fervent evangelical faith, in contrast with the flat moralism of the Aristotelian ethics and the Scholastic Pelagianism.¹³¹ We refer to this debate only because of the additional evidence it gives us that the Reformer's development was being shaped more and more by his devotion to the Scriptures and the early fathers. In the introduction to the Theses Luther declares it as his purpose to draw his statements "from the divine Paul, the choicest vessel and organ of Christ, and then from St. Augustine, his most faithful interpreter."¹³² And it was this fidelity to Scripture and the fathers that especially impressed one of the youthful hearers, Martin Butzer, who was won to the evangelical cause on that occa-

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, i, p. 285, ll. 33 f. We here follow Preuss, as cited, p. 34, who gives many further references to this effect.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, i, p. 305, ll. 3 ff. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 286, ll. 31 f.: "*Sic enim non Scholastici, sed Ecclesiastici, imo coelestis Paulus loquitur.*"

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, i, p. 306, ll. 14 f., with the characteristic addition: "*Sed veritas est Deus, qui falli non potest.*"

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, i, p. 308, ll. 25 f.: "*Aliud est, Papam narrare, aliud statuere, Imo longe aliud Papam statuere, et Concilium approbare.*" Here then is a virtual rejection of a genuine Extravagant—that of Clement VI (1342-52) on indulgences. Luther disregarded the papal teaching because it had never been "approved" by a council (see the context). Cf. his assertion of a few months later: "Darumb wan ess die kirch beschleusst, sso wil ich glauben, das das ablas seelen erlosso" (*ibid.*, i, p. 390, ll. 15 f.; "Eyn Freyheytt des Sermons Bebstlichen Ablass und gnad belangend," June, 1518). How "the church" is to determine the matter—by what form of council—Luther does not say. He is not yet clear on that point.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 350-374. Cf. Loofs, *Leitfaden*,⁴ p. 720 f.

¹³² *Ibid.*, i, p. 353, ll. 12 ff.

sion.¹³³ Aristotle, the Schoolmen, the canons and decretals have become negligible quantities.

To his lengthy *Resolutiones* on the Ninety-five Theses—finished in May, but not completely published till August, 1518—Luther prefixed a “Protestation,” which reflects his characteristic vacillations during the summer and fall of this year. He declares that he “will assert or hold nothing but what is and can be held, in the first instance, in and by the sacred Scriptures, then by the ecclesiastical fathers received by the Roman Church and still accepted, and the canons and decretals of the popes.” At the same time he indicates his willingness still to submit to the decisions of his superiors, while he reserves the right of rejecting the mere opinions of Thomas, Bonaventura, or other Scholastics and canonists that have no “text or proof,” or accepting them upon the basis of the Pauline advice, “prove all things.”¹³⁴ In the Resolutions themselves the Scriptures are constantly used to validate his arguments, and are frequently represented as his only authority. At other times they are found in combination with the fathers or the canons or both.¹³⁵ It is interesting to see how he labors to bring the latter into harmony with his understanding of the Scriptures. The fathers derive their authority from the latter.¹³⁶ Canon laws, too, have limitations as to times, places, and persons, while the Scriptures are above such considerations.¹³⁷ Luther’s position, therefore, is still an illogical and inconsistent

¹³³ See his account of the Disputation, in the form of a letter to Beatus Rhenanus, *ibid.*, ix, pp. 161, ll. 32 ff.; 162, ll. 1 ff.; 163, ll. 24 ff., 39 ff.; 168, ll. 33 ff.; 169, l. 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 529 f. Kolde, as cited, p. 21, n. 1, uses this passage to buttress his statement: “Man sieht wie falsch es ist, das sogenannte Schriftprincip zu sehr zu urgieren; as ist vielmehr im letzten Grunde die Subjectivität das Entscheidende, wenn auch zugegeben werden muss, dass sie in der Schrift wurzelt.” But this concessive clause is only an understatement of the most important fact in regard to Luther’s relation to his “authorities” at that time: there was a growing appreciation of the principal significance of the Scriptures.

¹³⁵ Cf. Preuss, as cited, p. 40, notes 12, 13, 15, 16.

¹³⁶ *Werke*, as cited, i, p. 563, ll. 18 f.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 545, ll. 19 ff.

one. For if the Scriptures are the highest authority, why, to go no further, should the fathers and the canonical laws not suffer the same fate as the repudiated Scholastics?¹³⁸

The Resolutions throw further light on the Reformer's attitude to the pope. What pleases or displeases the pontiff is no concern to Luther: "he is a man like the rest."¹³⁹ The "keys" are not his—they are granted to every Christian for comfort and salvation. The pope, Luther says, "is my servant and minister in the keys; he himself as pope does not need them, but I do."¹⁴⁰ To say that the pope is to be entrusted with the material as well as the spiritual sword is "a gloss worthy of Tartarus."¹⁴¹ The pope cannot determine new articles of faith; only a council can do that: he can merely judge or rescind according to what has been decided.¹⁴² There is a difference to be made between the pope as such and as a man. Leo X is personally worthy of ruling in better times,¹⁴³ but some of his predecessors have been guilty "not only of errors and vices but also of monstrous things."¹⁴⁴ The pope is to be obeyed, "not on account of the statement: 'and whatsoever thou shall bind,' but on account of that general precept: 'Agree with thine adversary in the way,' and that other: 'whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,' and Rom. xii: 'Avenge not yourselves.'"¹⁴⁵ Luther even ventures to interpret the pope to suit himself.¹⁴⁶ Most striking is the declaration that was destined, under challenge by his foes, to push him toward the final break with the papacy; namely, that even at

¹³⁸ Cf. Schenkel, *Das Wesen des Protestantism*, i, p. 22.

¹³⁹ *Werke*, as cited, i, p. 582, ll. 19 ff.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, i, p. 596, ll. 31 ff.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, i, p. 624, l. 25.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, i, p. 582, ll. 38 f. Cf. p. 583, ll. 5 ff.; p. 568, ll. 19 ff.; p. 579, l. 34, and above, n. 130.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, i, 573, l. 18.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, i, p. 582, ll. 20 f.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, i, p. 619, ll. 4 ff.

¹⁴⁶ Preuss, *op. cit.*, p. 46, n. 10, instances the following: "*mens Papae est*" (i, p. 604, l. 15); "*mens Pontificis non potest esse alia quam*" (p. 628, l. 15); "*neque mens Papae est*" (p. 571, l. 37); "*ipse stilus Papae idem probat*" (p. 575, l. 18).

the time of Gregory the Great, the Roman Church did not stand over the other churches, at least not those of Greece.¹⁴⁷

The Resolutions, then, place the council above the pope. They even declare that the reformation of the Church "is not a matter for a single person, the pope, nor for the many cardinals, but for the whole world, rather for God alone."¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, in the extremely submissive letter¹⁴⁹ to Leo X prefixed to the Resolutions, he is prepared to hear in the voice of the pope the voice of Christ. Doubtless the true explanation for the inconsistencies between the dedicatory letter and the Resolutions themselves is that given by Löscher, namely, that Luther still cherished the hope that the acknowledged head of the Church would come to the conclusion that the writer could regard as the only proper one in the premises.¹⁵⁰ Taking the whole work together, then, we find that the pope, the council, and the Scripture each in turn is supreme.¹⁵¹ Such a conflict of authorities could not long endure.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, i, p. 571, ll. 17 ff. Cf. Köstlin, *Luthers Theol.*,² i, p. 225, on Luther's earlier knowledge of this as seen in the Lectures on the Psalms (*Werke*, Weim., iv, p. 345, l. 23).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, i, p. 627, ll. 27 ff.

¹⁴⁹ The letter closes (*ibid.*, i, p. 529, ll. 23 ff.): "*Quare, Beatissime Pater, prostratum me pedibus tuae Beatitudinis offero cum omnibus, quae sum et habeo. Vivifica, occide, voca, revoca, approba, reproba, ut placuerit: vocem tuam vocem Christi in te praesidentis et loquentis agnoscam. Si mortem merui, mori non recusabo.*"

¹⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, ii, pp. 178 f. Kolde, as cited, p. 19, misrepresents Löscher by saying that, according to him, the motive that prompted Luther's humble missive was fear, due to the reception, in the mean time, of a threatening letter from his superior, the bishop of Brandenburg. Löscher does, indeed, admit that such a letter may have been received, but adds that Luther hoped for a happy issue of his case in view of the reputed fairness of Leo X.

¹⁵¹ Cf. the significant restriction on the council's authority (*Werke*, as cited, i, p. 608, ll. 22 ff.): "*quia nullis . . . scripturis id probari nec rationibus ostendi potest, Nec ipsi, qui hoc tenent, probant, sed simpliciter narrant, ut omnibus notum est. Dixi autem prius, quod in ecclesia aliquid asserere, cuius nulla potest ratio vel auctoritas reddi, est ecclesiam hostibus et haereticis irrisioni exponere. . . .*" On the common meaning of "ratio" as the equivalent of "logical inferences," and therefore not to be taken as a separate source of knowledge and au-

In the next treatise we shall examine, "Eyn Freyheydt des Sermons Bepstlichen Ablass und gnad belangend,"—completed in June and printed for the second time in July, 1518—we have what appears to be the first clear expression of the principle of the supremacy of the Scripture. The Scripture is placed not only above all church teachers,¹⁵² but also above all popes: "Die seelen aber seyn nit mehr auff der erden, und wie woll ettlich sich understanden, dem Bapst zu schmeychlen, dissen spruch auch under die erden zuziehen, sso seyns doch gottis wort und sso offenbar, das sie noch blieben seyn und bleyben werden, dann sie seyn nit alleyn ubir sanct Peter und Pael und alle bebeste, sundernn auch ubir alle engel. . . ." ¹⁵³ But we need to be on our guard against cherishing a too high estimate of this hastily written and rhetorically colored apology.¹⁵⁴ For only a few pages before this passage the author speaks of the power of a common council finally to determine the truth that is spoken

thority, see Undritz, as cited, p. 584, and especially Preuss, as cited, pp. 15 f., 28, 39, 56, 98.

¹⁵² We quote this pointed sentence (*Werke*, Weim., i, pp. 384 f.): "Wan schon sso vil und noch mehr tausent, und sie alle heyliche lerer, hetten diss ader das gehalten, sso gelten sie doch nichts gegen eym eynigen spruch der heylichen schrift. . . . Wan nu die selben lerer hetten gleych gesagt (das sie doch nit thun), das die puss, yn Christus Worten gepoten, wurd durch das ablass abgelegt, sso solt man yhn gar nichts glauben, darumb das die schrift spricht: gottis wort mag niemant ablegen ader wandelen."

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, i, p. 390, ll. 24 ff.

¹⁵⁴ Undritz, as cited, p. 584, is quite sure that one of Carlstadt's Theses influenced Luther in this bold assertion of the supremacy of the Scriptures. The Thesis in question (see Löscher, as cited, p. 80) is no. xii in the series: "*textus Bibliae non modo uni, pluribusve ecclesiae doctoribus, sed etiam totius ecclesiae auctoritati, praefertur*" (with references to Augustine). But there is no proof of any such indebtedness, and as Seeberg reminds us (*op. cit.*, ii, p. 277, n. 1), this idea was widely current in the later Middle Ages. Cf. also Scheel, *Luthers Stellung, etc.*, p. 27, and Preuss, as cited, p. 47, n. 8, who with much reason asks why, if Luther followed Carlstadt in this particular, he did not at this time also adopt the latter's more advanced views as to the supremacy of the Scriptures over the general council (see Löscher, as cited, p. 80, Theses xvii and xx).

without the Scripture.¹⁵⁵ His vigorous language is due doubtless to his wrath over the arrogant tone of Tetzels most recent blast against him.¹⁵⁶

Among the further evidences that Luther was giving serious attention, during the summer of 1518, to the question of the authority of the pope and of the Church is the fact that he preached a sermon—probably on May 16th¹⁵⁷—on the subject of excommunication. The occasion for the discourse was the liability to this ecclesiastical punishment which many of his parishioners incurred by their disregard of the indulgences.¹⁵⁸ When some over-zealous friends or foes circulated portions of his remarks in garbled form, he published during the last days of August a Latin edition of the sermon, so far as he could recall it, in which he softened some of the severest expressions he had used in addressing the people. Nevertheless, in this work another tradition of the Church is set aside: the author boldly declares that excommunication cannot of itself deprive one of salvation. He teaches that there is a double communion of the faithful, one internal and spiritual, and the other external and corporal. The latter is a participation in the sacraments, and from this privilege the Church can exclude her members. But the former, based upon one faith, one hope, one love to God, no creature can give or take away; one forfeits it only by his own sin.¹⁵⁹

On the 7th of August Luther received a citation to appear

¹⁵⁵ *Werke*, as cited, i, p. 384, ll. 27 ff. Cf. the passage already referred to in note 130 (i, p. 390, ll. 15).

¹⁵⁶ Löschner, as cited, i, p. 484 ff.

¹⁵⁷ The date assigned by Knaake, in the Weimar edition of Luther's works (i, p. 634), following Köstlin, *M. Luther*,⁴ p. 211.

¹⁵⁸ Enders, as cited, i, p. 224. Kolde, *op. cit.*, p. 28, is probably correct in surmising that Luther preached on this subject for the further reason that he wished to clarify his own views.

¹⁵⁹ *Werke, Weimar*, i, p. 639, ll. 2 ff. The views bear a close resemblance to those of Huss, in his *De Ecclesia*; see the English translation by Dr. D. S. Schaff, especially p. 268: "For mortal sin alone divides or separates from communion of this kind, just as it separates from God himself." But Luther was not familiar with this treatise till the next year; cf. *Briefe* (ed. deWette), i, p. 341.

in Rome. The sermon we have just mentioned was a part of his answer to this summons. Another reply, more comprehensive and bolder, was his *Ad Dialogum Silvestri Prieratis de potestate papae Responsio*, published the same August. We have already become acquainted with the principles of the papal absolutism championed by Prierias.¹⁶⁰ At first sight, indeed, the Response seems to fall short of the advanced positions taken in regard to the supremacy of the Scriptures in the treatise *Eyn Freyheyt des Sermons*. For we frequently find the fathers and the canons placed alongside of the Scriptures.¹⁶¹ At the very beginning, however, the author, ignoring the four "fundamenta" of his opponent, sets up three principles of his own:¹⁶² (1) the words of Paul, "prove all things," I Thess. v. 21, and "If an angel of heaven should preach to you anything other than what ye received, let him be anathema," Gal. i. 8; (2) the word of Augustine to Jerome: "I have learned to yield this honor only to the canonical books of Scripture, that I may most firmly believe that no author among them has erred. But as to all other authors, no matter how great they may be in learning or sanctity, I do not accept their teaching as true simply because they so thought";¹⁶³ and (3) sellers of indulgences must (according to a statement of the canon law) abide by their instructions. While therefore the Scriptures, the fathers—as represented by Augustine—and the canons are here seemingly coordinated in importance, we may yet infer a virtual supremacy for the first named, not only from the well known fact that Augustine is placed highest among the fathers for the very reason that he is the best interpreter of the Scriptures, but also from the explicit statement¹⁶⁴ that Paul is his "first foundation."

¹⁶⁰ Pp. 578 f.

¹⁶¹ Preuss, as cited, p. 42, notes 2, 3.

¹⁶² *Werke*, Weimar, i, p. 647, ll. 18 ff.

¹⁶³ Luther quotes the passage freely; see *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (ed. Ph. Schaff) i, p. 350b.

¹⁶⁴ *Werke*, Weim., i, p. 662, l. 23. Cf. the reference (*ibid.*, i, p. 648, l. 2) to the already familiar "*proverbium . . . 'Turpe est Iuristam loqui*

The *Responsio*, however, marks real progress in his solution of the question of ecclesiastical authority. It is true, Luther practically allows Prierias' "third foundation" to stand; namely, that the Scripture draws its force and authority from the teaching of the Roman Church and the pope, as the infallible rule of faith; for he is still of the opinion, and thanks Christ for the fact, that this Church has never yet departed from the faith.¹⁶⁵ But the other claims of his antagonist are set aside as being "without Scripture and authority."¹⁶⁶ If the papal champion sees the Church in the pontiff and his cardinals, Luther sees it "virtually" only in Christ and "representatively" only in a council.¹⁶⁷ And not only so, but the pope as well as the council can err ("*tam Papa quam concilium potest errare*").¹⁶⁸ So far as the fallibility of the pope is concerned, this assertion is no novelty: we have already come across it in the *Asterisci*.¹⁶⁹ But in the passage before us it is buttressed with the authority of the canon "significasti" of Tudesco of Palermo, here for the first time cited, but frequently to be used in the future.¹⁷⁰ And new also is the assertion of the infallibility of the council as well as of the pope. There is therefore an inconsistency in the author's statement that even a council can err, and his acknowledgment that the Church is to be found representatively only in *sine textu*" and the corresponding need of theologians to honor the text of Scripture (see above, n. 119).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 25.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 656, ll. 33 ff.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 36.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 32.

¹⁶⁹ See note 119.

¹⁷⁰ The canon is given by Kolde, as cited, p. 5: "*In concernentibus fidem concilium est supra papam; unde non potest papa disponere contra dispositum per concilium . . . puto tamen, quod si papa moveretur melioribus rationibus et auctoritatibus, quam concilium, quod standum esset sententiae suae. Nam et concilium potest errare . . . in concernentibus fidem etiam dictum unius privati esset praeferendum dicto papae, si ille moveretur melioribus rationibus novi et veteris testamenti, quam papa, etc.*" Cf. what Kolde says (*ibid.*) of other representatives, in the later Middle Ages, of the theory of the fallibility of popes and councils.

a council. To be sure he has not yet said that any council has erred, and doubtless his hope still is that a council, in acting upon his case, would not depart from the true faith, any more than one ever did, according to him, do so in the past. Finally, Prierias' "fourth foundation," that the deed as well as the word of the Church is binding, is rejected, if by the term "Church" is meant the curia; "for such a church," Luther repeats, "can err." Then he adds: "But the universal Church cannot err," and appeals to d'Ailly.¹⁷¹ How the universal Church can express its infallible verdict, we are not informed.¹⁷²

While therefore this *Responsio* does not furnish a further positive development of the principle of the authority of the Scriptures, it may be said to mark an advance in a negative way, by challenging more boldly the conflicting authorities of the pope and the council.¹⁷³ But the vacillations of the early summer are by no means removed. In some respects the attitude of the Reformer is even more inconsistent than it was. He has said that the pope and the council can err; virtually, he has asserted that the pope has erred; and he has taken the position that the well grounded opinion of a private person is superior to the judgment of the pope, if the former is moved by better biblical considerations.¹⁷⁴ At the same time, however, he professes to honor the power of the pope "as is proper."¹⁷⁵

At the Diet of Augsburg, Elector Frederick the Wise,

¹⁷¹ *Werke*, Weimar ed., i, p. 685, l. 21. Kropatscheck, as cited, pp. 64 ff., brings out the similarities (and differences) between Occam's and Luther's views as to the infallibility of the Scriptures and the fallibility of the pope and councils, and the infallibility of the "*ecclesia universalis*."

¹⁷² The meaning doubtless is that the trustworthiness of the universal Church is guaranteed by such divine assurances as "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it," and that therefore some true believers will ever be found in its membership—enough to preserve the truth in its purity; cf. Kolde, as cited, p. 28, n. 1.

¹⁷³ Cf. Undritz, as cited, p. 585.

¹⁷⁴ See above, in connection with notes 129, 168, 130, 170.

¹⁷⁵ "sicut decet" (*Werke*, Weim., i, p. 670, ll. 3 ff.—an elastic enough saving clause.

Luther's sovereign, secured for the Reformer the privilege of a hearing before the papal legate Cajetan. The interviews took place in the same imperial city, October 12-14. Our chief source of information in regard to them is the account—the *Acta Augustana*—published by Luther early in December, 1518.¹⁷⁶

The legate, an ardent curialist, at once demanded, upon the basis of an Extravagant by Clement VI ("Unigenitus"), the revocation of the statement Luther made in the Fifty-eighth Thesis of October 31, 1517, to the effect that the merits of Christ are not the treasury of indulgences. But Luther rejected this Extravagant and a similar one by Sixtus IV, on the ground that they misused the Scriptures,¹⁷⁷ which he preferred to the decretals. He further denied the claim of the legate, that the pope is superior to the council, to the Scriptures, and to the whole Church, and commended the recent appeal of the Sorbonne from the pope to a council.¹⁷⁸

On the second day, in the presence of four imperial senators, a notary and witnesses, Luther read a formal "protestation"¹⁷⁹ to the legate, in which he acknowledges that he cherishes and follows the Roman Church in all his words and deeds; that he is not conscious of having said anything against "the sacred Scripture, the ecclesiastical fathers, or the decretals of the popes,¹⁸⁰ or right reason"; nevertheless, being a man and liable to err, he is ready to submit to the judgment of the Church, "to all who know better," and specifically to the Universities of Basel, Freiburg, Louvain, or Paris.

¹⁷⁶ *Werke*, Weimar, ii, pp. 6-26.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 7 and 8.

¹⁷⁸ The appeal was made March 27, 1517. For the text see Löscher, as cited, i, pp. 554 ff.

¹⁷⁹ *Werke*, Weimar, ii, pp. 8 f.

¹⁸⁰ In view of the repudiation of the two Extravagants just named, he must mean only the decretals that are in harmony with the Scriptures. But as Kolde well says (p. 31, n. 2) this is rather sophistical, for his opponents would scarcely understand him in this sense.

On the third day Luther delivered a letter¹⁸¹ to the legate in defence of himself. In this he clearly puts the Scriptures above the papal decretals. These he calls "mere words." They often err, he maintains, and need correction by later ones.¹⁸² They ought to be tested by the Scriptures.¹⁸³ He also calls to his aid Augustine and Panormitanus with the canon "Significasti," which, as we have seen, puts every believer, supported by better authority, over the pope himself.¹⁸⁴ He is ready to recant, if any one can convince him of error; but he feels it to be his duty to stand by his statements, that they may not seem to be opposed to the canons.¹⁸⁵

At Nuremberg, on his return trip, he saw a papal breve to Cajetan, in which he was treated as a convicted heretic.¹⁸⁶ This accounts, in part at least, for Luther's bolder statements in the Appendix to the *Acta*, which he added late in October or early in November.¹⁸⁷ He here declares that the truth is mistress even over the pope, and that he will not wait for the human judgment, since he already knows the divine one.¹⁸⁸ His chief concern is the pure knowledge of

¹⁸¹ *Werke*, as above, ii, pp. 9-17.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 10, ll. 18 f.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, ll. 10 ff.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 19 ff. For the canon itself see note 170. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 11, l. 2: "*cum Papa non super, sed sub verbo dei sit iuxta Gal. i [8].*"

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12, ll. 32 f.

¹⁸⁶ The breve, of the 23rd of August, is embodied in the *Acta Augustana* (*ibid.*, pp. 23-25).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-22.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18, ll. 2 f. Cf. Kolde, as cited, p. 35, who remarks that these statements look almost like an attempt to excuse his appeal to the pope which he had drawn up in due form October 16, 1518. In this appeal (*Werke*, ii, pp. 28-33) he uses the same—doubtless the technically proper—forms of devout submission which we have already seen him use in his first letter to Leo X (accompanying his *Resolutiones* on indulgences); see above n. 149. No doubt the appeal was due to the advice of his friends and to his own wish to make a last endeavor for peace with the Church. Kolde infers from a letter written by Luther to Carlstadt on October 14 (deWette i, p. 160), "Aber mir wird gemacht ein Appellation," that the document may not have been prepared by him at all. It is certain, at any rate, that even before his interview with Cajetan he had determined to appeal to a council; see the letter of October 10 to Spalatin in Enders, as cited, i, p. 242, ll. 87 ff.

the Scriptures, which the "so-called holy decretals," if they do not corrupt, at least darken by their distorted words.¹⁸⁹ He gives an example of the perverted papal exegesis in the case of the canon on the "transferred priesthood,"¹⁹⁰ by which the Church teaches the transmission of the Mosaic priesthood from Moses to Christ, and from him to Peter and to his followers. Most important of all is the denial of the divine right of the papal supremacy. Not only does his more spiritual conception of the Church, as taught by Luke xvii. 19f.¹⁹¹ strike at the very heart of Romanism, but reverting to Matt. xvi. 18 ff., he denies that the Roman Church was placed over all others in the world.¹⁹² If the pope's supremacy were of divine right, and no one could be saved except by being under his authority, then the Christians of the whole Orient and of Africa for upwards of eight hundred years would be cast out. As for Gregory the Great, he repudiated the title of "universal bishop."¹⁹³ The monarchy of the pope, if it is to be proved at all, can rest only on such a statement as that in Romans xiii.[1]: "Every power is from God; the powers that be are ordained of God." In short, if the "monstrous" claims of the pope were allowed, Scripture and the Church would perish and nothing but the word of man would remain.¹⁹⁴

In a lengthy letter to Frederick the Wise, of November 19, 1518, Luther defends himself in view of the unfavorable issue of the Augsburg conference. He here emphasizes that it is a matter of conscience with him not to recant until he is convinced of his error by the Scriptures; but Cajetan, he insists, gave him not a single scriptural proof.¹⁹⁵

Luther had nothing more to hope for from the pope. His

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 18, ll. 18 ff.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 19, ll. 2 ff.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20, ll. 4 ff.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 19 f.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 20, ll. 6 ff. Cf. the statement concerning Gregory the Great in the *Resolutiones*, *ibid.*, i, p. 571, ll. 17 ff., and above in connection with n. 147.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 22, ll. 19 ff.

¹⁹⁵ Enders, as cited, i, p. 286, ll. 86 ff.

appeal to the pontiff was answered, as it were, by a bull of November 9th, 1518, in which the traditional views of indulgences were sanctioned, and all opponents threatened with excommunication.

Accordingly, on the 28th of November, Luther formally appealed "*a Papa ad Concilium*."¹⁹⁶ He patterned his communication after the celebrated appeal of the Sorbonne.¹⁹⁷ The suppliant declares that he does not propose to say anything against the authority of the apostolic see or the power of "our most holy lord the pope, the well advised"¹⁹⁸—the last qualification pointing to the writer's determination to have the truth of Scripture as the supreme arbiter; for the pope is a man, like ourselves, compassed with infirmity, capable of erring, sinning, lying and becoming vain,¹⁹⁹ whom it is our duty to oppose to the face, if he enjoins or decrees anything contrary to the divine commandments.²⁰⁰ In a word, "*potestas Papae*" is "*non contra nec supra sed pro et infra scripturae et veritatis maiestatem*," and a "*sacrosanctum Concilium in spiritus sancto legitime congregatum, sanctam ecclesiam catholicam repraesentans*" is "*in causis fidem concernentibus supra Papam*."

In a letter to Wenzelaus Link (December 11, 1518) still another light is thrown upon Luther's conception of the curia at this time: he surmises that in it the true Antichrist is reigning.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ *Werke*, ii, pp. 34-40.

¹⁹⁷ The curialists were opposed to such appeals; e.g., Cajetan, *ibid.*, ii, p. 8, ll. 12 f. On the various views regarding the authority of the general council on the eve of the Reformation, see Kolde, as cited, pp. 1-8.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 37, ll. 4 ff.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37, ll. 9 ff., 18 ff.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39, ll. 31 f.

²⁰¹ deWette, as cited, i, p. 193. Undritz, as cited, p. 589, wrongly puts "the pope and the papacy" for "the Roman curia." It was in a letter to Spalatin, March 13, 1519 (deWette, i, p. 239) that he said, "I do not know, whether the pope is Antichrist or his apostle," and in another to the same friend, dated Feb. 24, 1520 (Enders, as cited, ii, p. 332, l. 37), that he said, "I do not doubt that the pope is truly that Antichrist whom the world by common opinion is looking for." For the then

By the close of the year 1518, then, we find that Luther has inwardly and outwardly broken with all the traditional authorities of the Church except those of a general council and the Scriptures. Aristotle and the Schoolmen have no normative value apart from their agreement with the Scriptures. The fathers, too, are not always trustworthy; even *their* highest service is that of promoting a right understanding of the sacred text. The decretals have lost their authority altogether; for popes can err and have repeatedly erred. The significance of the developments at Augsburg lies in the fact that the condemned heretic definitely abandons the curialistic in favor of the conciliar theory regarding the seat of the highest ecclesiastical authority.²⁰² And if he has admitted that councils as well as popes may err, he has not yet declared that any council ever has erred, and he still sincerely believes that the council for which he has asked will make no mistake in his case. In fact, then, if not as yet in theory, the Scripture is his only authority. It alone can decide questions of faith.

The next year, 1519, witnessed the rejection of the authority of the council, leaving only that of the Scriptures, alike in principle and in practice. To this final stage in the solution of his problem we now turn our attention.

The extreme conservatism of the Reformer is nowhere more clearly seen than in the slow and vacillating manner in which he accepted the consequence of some of his bolder declarations concerning the authority of the church council. In a letter of early January,²⁰³ after the interview with

current views of Antichrist, see Bauer, "Luther und der Papst" in *Schriften des Ver. f. Reformationgeschichte*, xxvii Jahrg., pp. 251-253; also Hans Preuss, *Die Vorstellungen vom Antichrist in späteren Mittelalter, bei Luther und in der konfessionellen Polemik*, Leipzig, 1916, especially pp. 83-183.

²⁰² Undritz (as cited, p. 574, cf. p. 588) is not accurate in characterizing the results at Augsburg as an "innerer Bruch mit der Autorität von Papst, Konzil und Kirche." Cf. Scheel, *Luthers Stellung, etc.*, pp. 26 and 29.

²⁰³ *Briefe* (de Wette) i, pp. 207 f.

Miltitz at Altenburg, he promises the Elector Frederick that he will remain silent, if his opponents do; that he will "humbly submit" to the pope and confess to him that he has been "too fiery and sharp"; that he will publish a statement admonishing the people to obey the Roman Church and not to construe his writings as a disgrace but as an honor to this Church; and lastly that he will accept the verdict of a German bishop regarding the whole controversy.²⁰⁴ But he closes with the laconic sentence: "For nothing will come of the revocation." In the promised "humble" letter to the pope²⁰⁵ he certainly goes to the extreme of submissiveness, and in the *Unterricht auf etliche Artikel*—before February 24, 1519—he redeems his pledge that he would urge obedience to the Roman Church; but at the same time he insists that God's commandments should be honored, and that the question of the extent of the papal power²⁰⁶ is not essential to salvation but may be settled by the learned. Ere long, indeed, he felt dissatisfied with even these concessions.²⁰⁷

The issue concerning the supreme ecclesiastical authority became acute early in the year 1519, when Prof. Dürer, sheim of Leipzig, having learned that Luther in the privacy of his class room, was challenging the *ius divinum* of the papal supremacy, sought by means of several lengthy letters to elicit from the Reformer a statement of his arguments on this point.²⁰⁸ We need not dwell upon this correspondence. It is sufficient to say that Luther used the legislation of the Council of Nicæa (325 A.D.) as

²⁰⁴ We need not inquire as to how his willingness to submit to such a tribunal is to be harmonized with his appeal to a council. From the beginning he had no confidence in this compromise measure, and probably did not take it seriously; *ibid.*, pp. 211, 216 f.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 233 ff. Concerning the error of the traditional date, March 3, which is much too late, see Enders, as cited, I, p. 444, n. 1, and Preuss, as cited, p. 58.

²⁰⁶ *Werke*, Weimar, ii, p. 72, ll. 35 ff.; p. 71, ll. 1 ff.; p. 73, ll. 6 ff.

²⁰⁷ Enders, ii, p. 2, ll. 45 ff.

²⁰⁸ Löscher, as cited, iii, p. 22.

proof for his contention that either the papacy is not of divine right or the Nicene fathers were heretics,²⁰⁹ and that his main authority was the Scripture, according to which "the apostles were all equal."²¹⁰ Dungersheim's second letter is a laborious attempt to defend the theory of the divine right of the papacy. In reply Luther magnifies the testimony of the Scriptures,²¹¹ saying that it is his custom, following the examples of Augustine and Bernhard, to trace the brooks back to their sources,²¹² and that he does not believe that he commits any sin when he dissents from the fathers in some obscure text.²¹³ Even Augustine is not a perfect interpreter of Scripture.²¹⁴

The truce to which Luther and Miltitz had agreed was broken in February, 1519, when the former, justly feeling himself attacked by the theses which the latter had published, nominally against Carlstadt, in August, 1518, composed twelve counter-theses answering those of the papal champion point for point. Both sides understood that the ques-

²⁰⁹ Enders, i, p. 367; deWette i, p. 206. Undritz, as cited, p. 593, owing to his acceptance of the incorrect date for the letter to Leo X (see note 205) wrongly dates this letter in April.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*: '*Ego autem nitor verbis Evangelii, quod omnes Apostoli fuerunt aequales, et illo Matthaei xviii, 'quodcunque solveritis, etc.'*' Undritz (pp. 594 f.), doubtless following Kolde (as cited, p. 41, n. 2), regards this as the first clear and distinct expression of the consciously recognized Scripture principle. Certainly the declaration is quite striking; and Undritz rightly emphasizes "the inner ripening" of the Reformer in this controversial period. But we cannot accept the fanciful distinction that Undritz makes between this sentence as a mere stating of the Scripture principle and later utterances as postulations of the principle. On the other hand, Scheel, *Luthers Stellung, etc.*, p. 30, seems to go too far in the other direction in saying: "Von einem Schriftprinzip darf man hier überhaupt nicht sprechen, nicht einmal von einem humanistischen (Preuss [*op. cit.*], p. 60)." Scheel's statement, "Die Schrift ist also nur ein historisches Beweismittel neben anderen, in diesem Fall gleichwertigen," is true, but the implication seems to be that it is only in religious or moral considerations that we need regard the Scripture as a normative authority.

²¹¹ Enders, i, pp. 438 ff.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 439 ll. 60 ff.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 440, ll. 94 f.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 80 ff.

tions would be discussed at Leipzig in the near future. Later they each inserted an additional thesis on the freedom of the will. The most important proposition was the thirteenth, on the primacy of the pope. Luther's contention was the following: "*Romanam Ecclesiam esse omnibus aliis superiorem, probatur ex frigidissimis Romanorum Pontificum decretis intra cccc annos natis, contra quae sunt historiae approbatae MC annorum, textus scripturae divinae et decretum Niceni Concilii omnium Sacratissimi.*"²¹⁵

He did not question the primacy of honor given to the pope through many centuries, but he complained of the papal perversion of the Scriptures and denied that Christ was not head of the Oriental Church.²¹⁶ In his *Operationes* on the Psalter and in his Commentary on Galatians (March and April, 1519) he criticised the unspiritual conception of the Church which the papal party defended, and again attacked the divine right of the papal supremacy.²¹⁷

In May or June, shortly before the Debate at Leipzig, Luther published some of the results of his painstaking studies in the early history of the Church, in his *Resolutio . . . super propositione xiii de potestate papae*. In this lengthy dissertation he sets forth his new views of the Church as a spiritual organization, and, while admitting the primacy of the pope on grounds of human right and custom, denies that either Scripture or the Nicene Council supports the theory of the divine right of the papacy.²¹⁸ Many decretals are not genuine;²¹⁹ they are not only "*frigidissima*" but also "*impiissima*,"²²⁰ and one of them is blasphemous.

²¹⁵ *Werke*, Weimar, ii, p. 161, ll. 35 ff., in the *Disputatio et Excusatio F. Martini Luther adversus criminationes D. Iohannis Eccii*. Cf. the slightly different form of the thesis in the *Resolutio Lutheriana super propositione sua . . . de potestate papae*, *ibid.*, p. 185, ll. 8 ff.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159, ll. 12 ff.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, v, p. 61, ll. 1 ff., p. 131, ll. 27 ff.; ii, p. 447, ll. 28 ff., *et passim*.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 227, ll. 28 ff.; p. 189, ll. 27 ff.; p. 194, ll. 24 ff. (on John xxi. 18); p. 201, ll. 36 ff.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 202, ll. 12 ff.; p. 203, ll. 10 ff.; p. 209, ll. 15 f.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 204, ll. 31 f.

mous.²²¹ The real *ius divinum* is the Scripture itself.²²² No wonder that the Hussites began to look upon Luther as one of their own number.²²³

The Leipzig Disputation brought the issue to a head.²²⁴ In his initial protestation, Luther, following Carlstadt, accepted the "Catholic" (not the "Roman") Church and the Scriptures as his judge.²²⁵ Eck began the discussion, on the morning of July 4th, with a virtual begging of the question: "The monarchy and single headship in the Church of God is of divine right and was instituted by Christ; therefore, the texts of sacred Scripture or established history do not oppose it."²²⁶ Luther argued that Christ is the head of the Church, and then by means of Scripture and historical considerations showed—as before in the *Resolutio*—that the pope has no divine right to ecclesiastical supremacy.²²⁷

On the morning of the 5th, Eck cleverly prepares the way for an identification of Luther's view with those of Wyclif and Huss, which had been condemned at the famous council of Constance, among them being the following: "It is not necessary to salvation to believe that the Roman Church is supreme among the rest", and "Peter is not and was not the head of the holy Roman Catholic Church."²²⁸ The uncertainty still prevailing in Luther's position is revealed,

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 218, ll. 29 f.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 279, l. 24 (in the Leipzig Debate; but the idea underlies the argument in the *Resolutio* itself). Cf. p. 184, ll. 2 f., and ll. 19 ff.; and Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie*,² i, p. 233.

²²³ Cf. Kolde, as cited, pp. 46 f.

²²⁴ We assume that the general course of the debate is sufficiently familiar. The details may be read in Löscher, *op. cit.*, iii, pp. 214 ff.; the Weimar edition, ii, pp. 251 ff.; Köstlin, *M. Luther*, pp. 258 ff.; and Preuss, as cited, pp. 76 ff.

²²⁵ *Werke*, Weimar, ii, p. 254, note 1. Cf. p. 264, ll. 3 ff.: "*sed in contentione accipiendus est sensus genuinus et proprius scripture, qui stare in acie possit, a quo sancti patres nonnunquam locupletande orationis gratia digrediuntur et sine culpa*" (as against even Bernard).

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 255, ll. 25.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 257 f.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 275, ll. 8 ff.

on the one hand, by his indignant rejection of the charge that he is a member of "the Bohemian faction," and by his assurance that he was always opposed to this schism; and, on the other, by his expression of wonder that among so many foes of the Bohemians no one has ever worthily refuted their error to the glory of the Roman Church.²²⁹ Then in the afternoon of that day, reverting to the same point, but still explicitly refusing to defend the defection of the Bohemians, he affirms that "it is certain, that among the articles of John Huss or the Bohemians many are plainly most Christian and evangelical, which the universal Church cannot condemn, as for example this one: 'there is only one universal church.'"²³⁰ Eck triumphantly accuses him of being inoculated with "the Bohemian virus" of pretending to "know the Scriptures better than do the pontiffs, councils, doctors and universities,"²³¹ and charges him with impugning the authority of "the holy and praiseworthy council of Constance."²³² Thrice in the course of the afternoon Luther interrupts Eck with sharp denials and charges of falsehood. Obviously, the Reformer does not grasp the significance of his own statements. Almost a year ago—at Augsburg—he had said that a council can err; but never yet had he said that a council has erred. And he is even now shocked by the logic of his declaration concerning the condemned articles of Huss and the Bohemians, and in his confusion he can only discount his own words. The next day, with growing boldness, but still with a measure of inconsistency amounting to sophistry, he declares that four sentences of Huss are scriptural and evangelical, but at once seeks to save the authority of the council of Constance, by saying that among the sentences of Huss condemned by this tribunal not all were heretical, but some were "erroneous, some blasphemous, some foolhardy, some seditious, some

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 35 ff., and p. 278, ll. 29 ff.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 279, ll. 10 ff.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 282, ll. 12 ff.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 283, ll. 27 ff.

offensive to pious ears," or else the condemnations were interpolated in the record.²³³ Doubtless, he feels the weakness of such a defence, and presently, relying upon Augustine and Tudesco, he boldly declares that the word of God is infallible and that the council is its creature.²³⁴ He repeats the familiar biblical and historical arguments against the divine right of the papacy, and finds fault with Eck for using no Scripture except Matt. xvi. 18f., and even that in a way contrary to the interpretation of the majority of the ancient fathers.²³⁵

On the morning of July 7th, Luther seems to retreat from his advanced position of two days before, and to involve himself more deeply in inconsistencies.²³⁶ On the one hand, he agrees with Eck, that "the dicisions of councils in matters of faith are by all means to be accepted"; but on the other hand, he at once adds: "this only do I reserve for myself . . . that a council has at times erred, and can at times err, especially in those things which do not pertain to faith; neither has a council the authority to set up new articles of faith."²³⁷ The inference is unavoidable, that even in matters of faith a council has at times erred. Far-reaching as the statement is, it is for the present a mere deduction from a single word, the adverb "especially." And whereas about a year ago—in the Resolutions on indulgence—²³⁸ he asserted that a council alone could make new articles of faith, he now denies it this right. It is no final authority. Under the circumstances it is rather strange that Eck did not more thoroughly exploit this alleged agreement with himself, particularly in view of Luther's demand that Eck show "that a council cannot err, has not erred or does not err, since a council cannot make a divine right out of that which by its nature is not divine right," and only that

²³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 285 f., p. 288, ll. 14 ff.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 288, ll. 32 ff., p. 289, ll. 1 ff.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 297, ll. 12 ff.

²³⁶ Cf. Köstlin, *M. Luther*,⁴ pp. 266.

²³⁷ *Werke*, as cited, ii, p. 303, ll. 16 ff.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, i, p. 568, ll. 19 ff., p. 579, ll. 33 ff.

is heretical "which is contrary to divine right."²³⁹ On July 11th, in connection with the discussion of indulgences, he again reveals how hard it is for him to break with this last species of ecclesiastical authority, that of the council. For he concedes: "I believe that the council and the Church never err in matters of faith; in other things it is not necessary not to err."²⁴⁰ To be sure, he here explicitly differs from Eck as to the extent of this category of "matters of faith." Indulgences, according to Luther, are not to be included in the list. Errors of practice in this realm are not to be regarded as deviations from the truth. But in itself this statement as to the reliability of the council in matters of faith conflicts with his testimony on July 5th, when he virtually charged the council of Constance with error in the case of a "*nobilissimum articulum fidei*."²⁴¹ But in his vacillation on this point he again makes the Scripture his supreme authority, saying, among other things, that the church cannot give a book—he is thinking of II Maccabees—more authority or strength than it has in itself,²⁴² and that "a council cannot make Scripture"—he has the theory of indulgences in mind—"out of that which by its nature is not Scripture, just as the Church was not able to make the Gospels, even though it approved the Gospels."²⁴³

The significance of the Leipzig Disputation, then, is to be found in the conclusion, qualified, yet decisive, which Luther was forced by his opponent to accept in regard to the general council. That authority is only of a secondary, because derived, character. True, neither in the debate itself nor in his letters of the next few weeks,²⁴⁴ does he

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 308, ll. 30 ff., p. 313, ll. 3 ff.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 339, ll. 25 ff., p. 347, ll. 3 ff.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279, l. 16.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 325, ll. 17 ff.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 329, ll. 32 ff.

²⁴⁴ Cf. the letter to Spalatin, July 20, 1519, and that to the Elector Frederick, August 18, 1519, in deWette, as cited, i, especially pages 286 and 314.

consistently and definitively settle the question as to whether the council of Constance erred in a matter of faith. But in the course of the summer, alike in his *Resolutiones Lutherianae super propositionibus suis Lipsiae disputatis* (end of August) and in his *Contra malignum Iohannis Eccii iudicium* (September) he repeatedly declares that the council did err.²⁴⁵

And from this time on he more and more emphasizes the supreme and exclusive authority of the Scriptures. The following deliverance is typical: "*Et ut plane et libere dicam, quod sentio, credo me theologum esse Christianum et in regno veritatis vivere, ideo me debitorem esse non modo affirmandae veritatis, set etiam asserendae et defendae seu per sanguinem seu per mortem. Proinde volo liber esse et nullius seu Concilii seu potestatis seu universitatum seu pontificis autoritate captivus fieri.*"²⁴⁶ The ground for this conviction lies in the fact that "the holy Scripture is the Word of God."²⁴⁷ and that the divine Spirit is himself the teacher of the true sense of the revelation.²⁴⁸ The pope is Antichrist for this reason chiefly, that, unlike Lucifer, who wished only to be on an equality with God, he arrogates

²⁴⁵ *Werke*, Weimar, ii, p. 405, ll. 20 ff.; p. 406, ll. 5 ff., 12 ff., 26 ff.; p. 410, ll. 10 ff.; p. 651, ll. 27 ff.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 404, ll. 10 ff.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 649, l. 15. The rest of the sentence is as follows: "*quod si asina diceret, audiendum est etiam prae omnibus angelis, si verbum dei non haberent, nedum prae papa et concilio sine verbo dei agentibus.*" In view of this and many similar passages that might be quoted, especially from the later works of Luther, it is evident that Harnack is beside the mark with this statement (*Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*,⁴ iii, p. 858): "Luther opponirte aber in derselben Zeit, in der er den Kampf gegen die Autorität der Concilien so tapfer führte, auch gegen die Unfehlbarkeit der Schrift." The free critical attitude of Luther toward the Scriptures is not to be interpreted as if, in his judgment, they were fallible like the deliverances of a council.

²⁴⁸ Cf. the letter to Spalatin, Feb. 12, 1519; "*Vides quam Evangelii verba se ipsa exponunt, suasque glossas secum habent ut nihil necesse sit aliena et humana misceri*" (deWette, i, p. 226), also *Werke*, Weimar, ii, p. 429, ll. 25 ff.; p. 431, ll. 24 ff., 35 f.; and Thimme, as cited, pp. 650 ff., *et passim*.

to himself the exclusive right to interpret the Scriptures and therefore places himself above God.²⁴⁹

There is no need of pursuing the investigation into Luther's later works. The year 1519 marks the close of his development of the principle that the Scripture is not only the chief but the only norm for Christian faith and conduct. True, the mere assertion of the principle did not necessarily secure its practical application against the other authorities with which it came into more or less bitter conflict.²⁵⁰ But henceforth there were no vacillations or retrogressions as to the validity of what is now recognized as the formal principle of Protestantism.²⁵¹

Upon the basis of his deep experience of the grace of God revealed in the Gospel, Luther was led step by step, by the inner necessities of his faith and especially by the opposition of his foes, to estimate for himself the whole series of authorities which as a dutiful son of the Roman Catholic Church he had revered from his earliest years and which he continued to recognize, though with varying degrees of satisfaction and assurance, for a considerable time after he had raised what he regarded as a merely academic question, that concerning the nature of indulgences. First of all, the Scholastics, with their patron in philosophy, Aristotle, were discredited: their views no longer accorded

²⁴⁹ *Werke*, Weimar, ii, p. 430, ll. 1 ff. (with reference to II Thess. ii. 4). The context deals with Luther's attempt to harmonize Augustine's famous dictum, "Evangelio non crederem, nisi Ecclesiae crederem," with his own changed conception as to the right relation between the authority of the Scriptures and that of the Church, including the fathers, the pope, and the council.

²⁵⁰ Undritz, as cited, pp. 602 ff., traces the use made of the Scripture principle by Luther up to the Diet of Worms (1521). But he admits that "the real development" of the principle is finished by September, 1519 (*Contra malignum I. Eccii . . . Defensio*). His contention that before 1519 the principle was only asserted but thereafter was made a postulate as against the adversary, is not borne out by the facts. There is only a greater clearness in apprehending, and a firmer determination in applying the principle, alike for offensive and defensive purposes.

²⁵¹ Cf. his later statements in the *Tischreden*, Erlangen ed., pp. 34, 92.

with his reflections upon his own evangelical experience and upon the teachings of that Apostle whose words on justifying faith had proved his chief comfort in the great crisis of his life. The controversy concerning indulgences then led to the repudiation of the authority of the pope as a fallible human being, whose official utterances often perverted the Scriptures as much as their evil lives dishonored its precepts. After the interview with Cajetan at Augsburg, Luther lost his earlier confidence in the fathers as trustworthy guides in the interpretation of the Bible: they frequently contradicted one another, and their teachings, especially on the subject of the primacy of the pontiff, were erroneous. The appeal from the pope to the council introduced a period of uncertainties, but at the Leipzig Disputation he spoke the fateful word that sooner or later had to lead to a repudiation of the last of these medieval authorities: the council of Constance, in one of the "noblest articles of faith," condemned sentences that are "most Christian and evangelical." Only the Scriptures were left him, and to his believing soul they authenticated themselves more and more as the word of God—the "*verbum Dei*" which is "*veritas*"²⁴² and which for that reason constitutes for every member of the true or universal Church the real "*ius divinum*."²⁵³

In a future issue of this REVIEW we shall endeavor to present, in a systematic form, Luther's varied views concerning the nature of the Scriptures as the supreme authority for Christian faith and life.

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²⁵² Cf. *Werke*, Weimar, iii, p. 397, ll. 12 f., p. 454, l. 25.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 279, l. 24.